



THE SCOTTISH HOUSING REGULATOR

Renfrewshire Council Inspection Report  
November 2008

## Contents

Chapter	Section	Page
1	<b>Introduction</b>	1
2	<b>Inspection grades and overview</b> Grades How well is Renfrewshire Council delivering? Is Renfrewshire Council managed for improvement? Key recommendations	3
3	<b>Context</b> About the organisation About its current and future tenants About its housing stock	7
4	<b>How well is Renfrewshire Council delivering housing management?</b> Grade Tenant satisfaction Access to housing Lettings Tenancy and neighbourhood management Income maximisation	12
5	<b>How well is Renfrewshire Council managing its assets and delivering repairs?</b> Grade Tenant satisfaction Asset management strategy and planning Investment and home safety Response repairs Value for money in procurement	26
6	<b>How well is Renfrewshire Council delivering services for homeless people?</b> Grade Access to service Advice and prevention Assessment of homeless people Securing accommodation	41
7	<b>Is Renfrewshire Council managed for improvement?</b> Leadership and strategic planning Performance management, planning and reporting Customer focus and influence Equalities and diversity Efficiency and value for money	54

Appendix 1 Sources of evidence

Appendix 2 Examples of positive practice

Glossary

## 1. Introduction

### About this inspection

- 1.1 This inspection was carried out by the Scottish Housing Regulator under section 72 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 on behalf of Scottish Ministers. Our purpose in inspection is to provide an independent external assessment of the effectiveness of housing service delivery and make recommendations to help improvement. Inspections are conducted within a published framework of *Performance Standards*.

### How we assessed performance

- 1.2 Our inspectors asked two key questions:
- How well is Renfrewshire Council delivering its services?
  - Is Renfrewshire Council managed for improvement?
- 1.3 In order to answer these questions inspectors:
- spoke to tenants, service users, staff and elected members of the Council;
  - asked other partner organisations for their views;
  - visited homes and local areas;
  - saw and tested first hand how well services were being delivered;
  - examined key policies, publications, information and the organisation's self-assessment submitted for this inspection; and
  - analysed published performance and financial information.
- 1.4 We have awarded grades for the housing management, asset management and delivery of repairs and homelessness services. The grades and judgements are based on evidence. The grades summarise performance in the following ways:
- Grade A = Excellent
  - Grade B = Good
  - Grade C = Fair
  - Grade D = Poor

1.5 When we provide a summarised assessment and award a grade, we take various factors into account. These factors are:

- outcomes for service users;
- how far the service or organisation meets Performance Standards;
- performance against key indicators in comparison with others;
- compliance with legislation;
- how good the leadership and accountability are;
- how far good practice is followed;
- the organisation's level of self-awareness;
- how well value for money is being achieved;
- local context and legitimate local priorities; and
- commitment to, and track record of, improvement.

### The inspection team

1.6 The inspection team was led by John Jenkins (Inspection Manager) and included Joyce Stewart, Scott Crossley, Robbie Fraser, Tom Burns, Andy Robinson and Mark Gibson (Inspectors), Andrea Paterson (Associate Inspector), Carolynne Watson (Inspection Officer), Lindsay McKenna (Inspection Administrator) with Christina Madden and Danny Mullen (Tenant Assessors). We were on site between 2 and 27 June 2008. We would like to thank everyone involved in the inspection, particularly the councillors, staff, service users and tenants for their time and co-operation.

### Responding to this inspection

1.7 We expect all inspected bodies to make the inspection grades and overview section of this report available to anyone that wants it, report our findings to tenants and other stakeholders and respond to the issues raised in this report.

## 2. Inspection grades and overview

In this section we set out our overall assessment of Renfrewshire Council's performance, including inspection grades and we summarise our inspection findings.

### Grades

- 2.1 The inspection of Renfrewshire Council's housing service took place between 2 and 27 June 2008. We awarded the following grades:

Renfrewshire Council has achieved a **B** grade for housing management. This is a **good** performance.

Renfrewshire Council has achieved a **C** grade for asset management and repairs. This is a **fair** performance.

Renfrewshire Council has achieved a **C** grade for services to homeless people. This is a **fair** performance.

### How well is Renfrewshire Council delivering its services?

- 2.2 Our assessment is that Renfrewshire Council's housing service has some strengths in the delivery of its services.

In housing management:

- it makes it easy for people to apply for its houses;
- it is meeting housing need through its allocations;
- it provides new tenants with an excellent range of information on tenancy and neighbourhood management;
- it has an excellent approach to dealing with antisocial behaviour; and
- it carries out annual ward inspections with elected members and local tenant representatives and agrees local action plans.

In asset management and repairs:

- it has a good asset management ICT system;
- its responsive repairs service is accessible to service users;
- it collects good feedback information from tenants;
- it has a good relet standard;

- its performance in carrying out Emergency repairs is good; and
- it is good at managing asbestos in its properties.

In delivering services for homeless people:

- it has made good progress in reducing its use of bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation;
- it has a robust approach to the homelessness assessment process;
- it is good at securing permanent accommodation for homeless people; and
- it has a number of good initiatives that help to prevent homelessness.

2.3 The Council does however have a number of weaknesses in the delivery of its services and some are significant.

In housing management:

- it has high levels of rent arrears owed by its tenants and former tenants;
- it takes some time to let its empty houses;
- it evicts a relatively high number of its tenants;
- it gathers insufficient information about its applicants' ethnicity; and
- its management of occupancy after it has been granted a recovery order.

In asset management and repairs:

- it does not have a strategic approach to asset management;
- it has weaknesses in its stock condition information;
- it is not fully complying with its statutory duties around gas safety and Right to Repair;
- it does not effectively involve service users in how it delivers its repairs and maintenance services;
- since 2007 it has deferred carrying out certain responsive repairs reported by its tenants; and
- its current procurement practices do not demonstrate a focus on value for money.

In delivering services for homeless people:

- its awareness of how applicants access its service is limited;
- it has used interviewing facilities that are not private;
- it did not put sufficient safeguards in place when it changed the way in which it deals with advice only cases;
- it is advising some people of likely non priority decisions in a way that may deter them from making a homelessness application; and
- it has weaknesses in its approach to providing temporary accommodation.

### Is Renfrewshire Council managed for improvement?

- 2.4 We found that the Council has a well established strategic planning and performance management framework. It has a good awareness of its current performance and the areas of service where it can improve. The Council has an excellent range of mechanisms to gather service users views and has frequently used these to improve its services. The Council has a culture of continuous improvement, was extremely responsive to our feedback during our inspection, and immediately made a number of early improvements to its procedures.
- 2.5 The Council has a good corporate approach to Equalities, which is being developed within Housing and Property Services. It is developing its approach to asset management of its housing stock. We found that it has a good awareness of the costs associated with the service and it has significant challenges in securing the funding necessary to bring its properties up to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. The Council needs to do more to ensure that it can demonstrate that it is achieving value for money in its procurement.

### Key recommendations

- 2.6 Our inspection report covers a wide range of issues. Renfrewshire Council must respond effectively to them. These are our most important recommendations.

Across all of its landlord and homelessness activities the Council should:

- increase its focus on value for money in how it procures and delivers its services;
- improve the information gathered around applicants' ethnicity; and

- ensure that it complies with its statutory responsibilities regarding Equalities impact assessments.

In housing management the Council should:

- continue to improve its performance in reducing rent arrears owed by its tenants and former tenants; and
- improve the time it takes to let its empty houses.

In asset management and the repairs service the Council should:

- develop a strategic focus for the management of its property assets;
- improve its understanding of its stock condition more quickly than it plans;
- improve its planning and management of its investment programmes to achieve the SHQS;
- ensure independent scrutiny of its internal contractor; and
- ensure it meets its legal duties on gas safety and Right to Repair.

In delivering services for homeless people the Council should:

- improve its information around how applicants access the service;
- provide applicants with private interview facilities;
- put in place safeguards for applicants receiving advice only;
- ensure that its advice to potential applicants does not deter homeless presentations; and
- improve its approach to providing temporary accommodation.

### 3. Context

In this section we look at Renfrewshire Council as an organisation and the context it which it operates.

#### About the organisation

- 3.1 Renfrewshire is one of Scotland's geographically smaller local authority areas, covering an area of approximately 270 square kilometres. Renfrewshire's population, based on the 2001 census, is approximately 170,000 and dispersed across its urban and rural centres with almost 109,000 residents in the three main towns of Paisley, Renfrew and Johnstone. Renfrewshire borders the local authority areas of West Dunbartonshire, East Dunbartonshire, Inverclyde, City of Glasgow, East Renfrewshire and North Ayrshire. The area is well served by public transport links, with a number of railway stations connecting Renfrewshire to the Clyde Coast and Ayrshire to the west, and Glasgow to the east. Access to the M8 motorway is close by. Glasgow International Airport is also situated within the Council's area along with the major retail park at Braehead.
- 3.2 Following the local government elections in May 2007, Renfrewshire Council is led by a Scottish National Party and Scottish Liberal Democrat coalition. The Council has 40 elected members consisting of:
- 17 Scottish Labour;
  - 17 Scottish National Party;
  - 4 Scottish Liberal Democrats; and
  - 2 Scottish Conservatives.
- 3.3 The Council's Leadership Board, is responsible for the strategic leadership of the Council. Six Policy Boards sit alongside the Leadership Board and exercise executive decision making:
- Housing and Community Safety;
  - Community and Family Care;
  - Education;
  - Environment and Infrastructure;
  - General Management and Finance and Planning; and

- Economic Development.

The Council's Leadership Board has the power to call in and review decisions from any of its Policy Boards. It also operates a Scrutiny and Petitions Board which undertakes audit and scrutiny functions together with monitoring and review of the Council's service delivery.

- 3.4 In February 2008, following a period of consultation, the Council agreed a scheme of decentralisation aimed at enhancing local consultation and strengthening the scrutiny function of councillors within multi-member wards. The scheme is based upon the creation of five Local Area Committees. It is intended that these Area Committees will have delegated decision making powers, monitoring Council-wide policy implementation and local partnership operation. While we were on site these Area Committees were holding their inaugural meetings and Housing and Property Services were developing re-aligned Tenant Participation and Local Housing Forum structures to reflect these changes.
- 3.5 Housing and Property Services is one of eight departments within Renfrewshire Council, and is the third biggest spending department. The Council's Chief Executive chairs weekly meetings of the Corporate Management Team. The Housing and Property Services management structure was recently reviewed and now comprises three divisions:
- Housing Services, which includes the homeless service;
  - Finance and Asset Management; and
  - Investment and Technical Services.
- 3.6 The present Director of Housing and Property Services is intending to retire in September 2008. At the time of our inspection the Council was engaged in recruiting a new Director.

**About its current and future tenants**

- 3.7 Since the late 1990s, Renfrewshire's population has declined by around 4%. General Register Office for Scotland mid-year estimates indicate that the area's population will continue to decline gradually over the next decade, with a projected population of 161,300 by 2018. In this period, the proportion of elderly residents is projected to increase, and this trend will ultimately have an impact on the future of the housing services which will be required in the area.
- 3.8 Renfrewshire's age profile is identical to the overall Scottish profile, with 63% of both populations comprising people of working age. In both cases, 18% of the population are children and 19% are pensioners.
- 3.9 Based on Scottish labour market statistics, published in 2003 and modified in April 2007, unemployment levels in Renfrewshire are 2.4%, which is slightly lower than the Scottish average of 2.5%. Nomis data indicates that the largest industries of employment in the area are public administration, education and health, distribution, finance and IT.
- 3.10 The gross average weekly earnings of residents in Renfrewshire are £435.60, slightly lower than the Scottish average of £441.00. In 2007/08, 49% of the Council's tenants received full housing benefit and 18% were in receipt of partial housing benefit.

**About its housing stock**

- 3.11 The tenure profile in Renfrewshire is broadly similar to the national picture. The 2001 Census figures indicate that social renting accounts for 27.5% of housing in the area, compared to 27.2% nationally. Of this, local authority housing comprises 21.5%, as compared to 21.6% nationally. Owner occupation is the primary tenure in Renfrewshire, accounting for 65.0% of housing in the area. This level is higher than the Scottish average of 62.6%. Private renting is less prevalent in the area, accounting for 4.2%, as compared to 6.7% nationally.
- 3.12 Renfrewshire Council had a housing stock of 13,980 properties at 31 March 2008, in settlements spread throughout the area. This is less than half the

number of houses it owned in the early 1990s and reflects the combined impact of both Right to Buy legislation and the Council's demolition programme of surplus housing stock. The vast majority of these remaining properties are of traditional construction; properties of non-traditional construction account for only 1.6% of the Council's stock. A low proportion of Renfrewshire's remaining properties are houses. Around 38% of the Council's stock is made up of tenements, with high-rise flats and other types of flatted accommodation accounting for a further 37%.

- 3.13 Renfrewshire Council's Local Housing Strategy (LHS) highlights distinctive housing markets in the area, and notes that house prices vary significantly between settlements, indicating affordability issues in some of Renfrewshire's outlying villages. Data from the Registers of Scotland indicates that average house prices in Renfrewshire as a whole were around £150,000 at the beginning of 2008, and range from average house prices in the rural village of Bridge of Weir of £215,000 to average prices of around £85,000 in Linwood.

## Challenges

- 3.14 As part of the Scottish Government's Community Ownership Programme, the Council developed proposals to transfer ownership of all of its housing stock to a newly formed Registered Social Landlord (RSL), Renfrewshire Housing Association. This proposal aimed to transfer ownership of the houses to an independent tenant controlled organisation, release significant resources for investment in the houses and allow the Council to write off the significant associated debt from its Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The Council's tenants voted against the transfer in a ballot in October 2006.
- 3.15 Following the ballot result, the Council expressed concerns about its ability to fund the investment needed to bring its properties up to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by the Ministerial target of 2015. The Council faces a number of significant challenges in this regard:
- The Council's rents are relatively high. In 2007/08 it had the second highest rents of local authorities in Scotland, exceeded only by the City of Edinburgh.

Over the last ten years the Council’s rents have risen steeply from the national average. The rent increase for 2008/09 was 2.5%.

- The Council's cost of repairing and maintaining its houses is the highest in Scotland and is around 25% higher than the average for Scottish councils.
- Renfrewshire Council’s housing debt is amongst the highest in Scotland, and it uses around 40% of its rental income from its tenants to service interest payments on this debt.
- The Council’s loss of rental income due to empty houses is one of the highest in Scotland and is increasing. The level of rent arrears written off by the Council has also increased over recent years.
- In recent years Renfrewshire Council has invested less in its houses than the average for Scottish councils.
- The Council has drawn down reserves in recent years in order to balance its HRA.

### Key Facts

3.16 The table below presents a summary of key information for Renfrewshire Council showing trends over the last three financial years.

Key facts	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Houses owned	15,000	14,424	13,980
No. of applicants on housing list as at 31 March	8,095	9,639	9,018
Employees	778	762	768
HRA Gross Capital Expenditure (incl. Capital Funded from Revenue (CFCR))	£16.2m	£24.5m	£14.5m
Total possible rental income	£38.0m	£37.7m	£37.1m
% of Rental income from Housing Benefit (HB)	65%	64%	62%
% of tenants in receipt of HB	69%	67%	67%
% of rent arrears	12.9%	11.6%	10.5%
Average weekly rent	£50.72	£52.74	£54.06
Average rent increase	4%	2.5%	2.5%
Houses re-let	1,691	1,175	1,409
Response repairs carried out	55,184	54,460	56,192
Maintenance spend per house incl. cost of service	£1,032	£1,099	£1386
No. of homeless applications	1,634	1,663	1,081

Sources: Renfrewshire Council's inspection submission and Scottish Government Statistical Bulletins

## 4. How well is Renfrewshire Council delivering housing management?

In this section we set out our assessment of Renfrewshire Council's performance in delivering its housing management service for tenants.

### Grade

Renfrewshire Council has achieved a **B** grade for housing management. This is a **good** performance.

4.1 Our assessment is that Renfrewshire Council's housing management service has many strengths, and small number of weaknesses, some of which are significant. The Council has a good level of self-awareness and was highly responsive to our feedback during the inspection. It has implemented a number of improvements in its housing management service and this is an important factor in our grade assessment.

4.2 The Council makes it easy for people to apply for housing. It meets housing need through its allocations and is working with partners to improve the outcomes for applicants. The Council makes available a good range of information for prospective tenants. It has an excellent approach to how it deals with antisocial behaviour and has introduced some innovative practices with its partners. It has supported tenant groups and it also continues to seek the views of a range of other tenants and service users.

4.3 The Council has weaknesses some of which are significant. These include:

- the level of rent arrears owed by its tenants and former tenants;
- the time it takes to let its empty houses;
- the number of its tenants it evicts
- the lack of information gathered around applicants' ethnicity; and
- its management of occupancy after it has been granted a recovery order.

;

## Tenant satisfaction

- 4.4 The Council's 2007 tenant satisfaction survey found that:
- 85% of tenants who responded said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their neighbourhood;
  - 84% said their home was in fairly good or very good condition; and
  - 81% were fairly satisfied or very satisfied with the Council as a landlord.

## Access to housing

- 4.5 Renfrewshire Council delivers its housing management service from its headquarters at Renfrewshire House in Paisley and through seven neighbourhood offices spread across its area. The Council also operates a Customer Service Centre in Renfrewshire House which deals with enquiries on a range of services including housing. The Customer Service Centre is open between 8 am and 6 pm.
- 4.6 The Council promotes access to its housing list through posters and leaflets displayed in its offices and the offices of other local housing providers, as well as through its website. The website includes an on-line enquiry form which customers can complete to request a housing application form. In addition, the Council promotes access to the list through its regular tenant and resident newsletters. It also produces a Housing Options Guide which contains useful information on applying for housing in Renfrewshire and making a homeless application, as well as providing details of other housing providers in the area.
- 4.7 From 2003 to 2007, the Council and five RSL partners developed and introduced a Common Housing Register (CHR) for Renfrewshire. In 2007, the Council commissioned an independent review of the CHR operation. This found that the high level of financial and staffing resources required for the CHR had created sustainability issues for all partners. Also, the large increase in the number of applicants for smaller landlords was affecting the quality of their delivery of services to applicants. The partners attempted to develop an ICT system to cope with six different allocation policies, but this proved to be complex and resource intensive. This led the partners to conclude that the CHR, in that form, was not sustainable and it was withdrawn from June 2007. While we were on site, the

- Council met with its RSL partners to start discussions about the development of alternative approaches to increasing access to housing in Renfrewshire, including the possibility of developing a revised model of CHR.
- 4.8 The Council uses nominations to RSLs to increase housing choice for applicants. It is in the process of developing and agreeing a joint nomination and section 5 referral agreement with its main RSL partners. The Council is aware that it has not always effectively monitored nominations, and part of the new agreement will include arrangements for improved recording and monitoring.
- 4.9 The Council implemented a new allocations policy in August 2007. It consulted widely on the proposed new allocations policy by holding a series of meetings with tenants, residents and applicants. In addition, it issued a special newsletter for applicants on the housing list explaining the proposed changes to the allocations policy and inviting comments. Following the formal approval of the policy, the Council wrote to all applicants on the housing list explaining the new system and outlining timescales for the introduction of the new policy. The Council also consulted with its Tenants Development Group on the new housing application form and guidance note. This is a positive approach to the involvement of tenants and applicants in the development of an important policy area. Our tenant assessors reviewed the Council's new housing application form and guidance leaflet. They found the form to be easy to read and complete, with good levels of information and clear details of how applicants could get further assistance.
- 4.10 At the time of our inspection, the Council had just over 9,000 applicants on its housing list. It operates an annual rolling review of the housing list. The Council has a target of 20 working days from receipt of all relevant information to process the application. It reports that it meets this target for 100% of applications, and indeed in the majority of applications we reviewed the Council processed them within three working days. The Council uses a series of comprehensive checks to ensure that it records and assesses applications correctly and consistently.

- 4.11 The Council recently piloted the use of a part-time Occupational Therapist (OT) to visit applicants in their own homes to assess their mobility and need for adaptations and support. The Council uses the OT's assessment to ensure that it gives appropriate priority to these applicants in its mobility allocation group. The Council has completed an evaluation of the pilot and now plans to make the OT post full-time.
- 4.12 In 2007/08, the Council cancelled 5,962 applications mainly as a result of implementing its new allocations policy. We found that the Council cancelled these appropriately and in line with its policy. The Council has a policy to re-instate cancelled applications up to one year after the date of cancellation. This is a good approach.
- 4.13 The Council's allocations policy sets out its approach to suspending housing applications for rent arrears, antisocial behaviour and breaches of tenancy conditions. At the time of our inspection, it had suspended 68 applicants from receiving offers, or less than 0.8% of those on its housing list, mostly for tenancy related debt. The Council had dealt with all the suspended applications we reviewed in line with its policy. Following an applicant's suspension from the housing list, the Council writes to explain the suspension and the reasons for it. We found its letters to applicants included only limited information on the date it would review the suspension, sources of independent advice and the right to appeal. The Council acted immediately to improve its letters when we raised this with it during the inspection.
- 4.14 The Council collects some information on the ethnicity of people who apply to it for housing, and for its new tenants. At present, however, it does not hold adequate levels of information on applicants' ethnicity. The Council developed proposals to address this issue during the inspection.
- 4.15 In summary, Renfrewshire Council is good at promoting access to its housing. It produces a good range of information for prospective tenants. The Council adopted a positive and inclusive approach to consulting on its proposed new

allocations policy and application form. It processes applications quickly and has a good approach to managing cancellations and suspended applications.

## Lettings

- 4.16 The Council introduced a new allocations policy in August 2007. Through this, it aims to allocate its houses to applicants it has placed into five allocation groups and then ranked within each group to reflect the level of their housing need. The Council lets its houses to each of these groups to meet targets it sets annually. The Council's letting targets and its performance against these are set out in the table below.

	2007/08		2008/09
	Target	Achieved	Target
<b>Group 1: homeless</b>	25%	28%	40%
<b>Group 2: mobility</b>	10%	5%	5%
<b>Group 3: housing need</b>	45%	46%	45%
<b>Group 4: exchanges</b>	20%	20.5%	10%
<b>Group 5: general</b>	0%	0.5%	0%

- 4.17 The Council introduced a short-life allocations initiative in early 2008, to tackle a backlog of homeless households waiting for permanent accommodation. It let around 50% of its lets to homeless people in the first two months of 2008/09. At the end of this initiative, the Council increased its annual target to its homeless group from 25% to 40%.
- 4.18 We saw that the Council allocates its houses consistently and in accordance with its policy, and that takes account of the statutory housing need categories. The Council maintains comprehensive and clear records of all of its allocation decisions.
- 4.19 The Council give applicants a good level of choice in terms of house type, form of heating and geographic locations. It also lets applicants specify particular streets they do not wish to be considered for. We saw that the Council housed the majority of applicants in areas they had selected as their first priority.

- 4.20 The Council's staff monitor its lettings performance on a daily basis and senior officers regularly review performance against its targets. It reports its lettings performance to elected members quarterly. The Council reviews its performance against targets annually and, where appropriate, amends targets for the next year.
- 4.21 In summary, the Council is good at meeting housing need through its allocations. It monitors the outcomes of its allocations and manages the process well.

### **Tenancies and neighbourhood management**

- 4.22 The provision of good information and access to support are important ways in which a landlord can help to manage and sustain tenancies. The Council provides an excellent range of information to its tenants on tenancy and neighbourhood management through its tenant handbook, regular newsletter, its wide range of leaflets and on its website.
- 4.23 The Council's approach to supporting new tenants to sustain their tenancies and to help prevent homelessness has major strengths. It uses a comprehensive tenancy sign-up process and provides good quality information for new tenants. The Council's Tenancy Officer aims to visit new tenants within 24 hours of the tenancy starting to deal with any necessary outstanding repairs and act as a first point of contact for the new tenant during the initial settling-in period. Its housing officers then visit each new tenant within four weeks. The Council achieved its four week target in all the cases we reviewed.
- 4.24 The Council's Neighbourhood Wardens aim to visit all new tenants in the areas they operate in within six weeks of the tenancy beginning to explain about the Warden Service. The Council does not always report on its performance against this target.
- 4.25 The Council's Financial Inclusion Officer visits all new tenants aged between 16 and 25 years old. In 2007/08, the Financial Inclusion officer saw 202 clients, assisted in 100 Housing Benefit claims and made 69 Community Care grant applications.

- 4.26 The Council established its Housing Support Team in 2003 to provide tailored housing support to new tenants who require some assistance to settle in their new home and to sustain their tenancy. The Council commissions further services from specialist providers for new tenants it assesses as needing higher levels of support. The Council's team has provided support to people who are vulnerable because they have a history of alcohol or other substance misuse, have offending behaviour, experience of the criminal justice system or who have some level of health problems which may impact on their ability to cope in their new home. In 2007/08, the team received 279 referrals, the majority for people with mental health issues.
- 4.27 The Council has identified groups of people at risk of losing their homes as a result of rent arrears, and has a programme to target information and advice to these groups. It has already targeted its efforts on young people and older tenants, and plans to focus on single men between the ages of 25 and 60 during 2008. This is a positive approach.
- 4.28 The Council has used the short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST) on a small number of occasions. Currently, it has 13 SSSTs: 5 it granted to tenants with a history of antisocial behaviour; and 8 it granted to young people in the Council's project for young people leaving care. We found that the Council's use of SSSTs is consistent with the circumstances permitted in legislation and that it follows the correct process to set these up. Following our feedback, the Council acted promptly to improve its early communications with SSST tenants it is taking action against.
- 4.29 The Council converted four SSSTs to full SSTs during 2007/08. The Council is proposing to increase the use of SSSTs where it has obtained a court order to recover possession for rent arrears and it aims to put in place a support package. It plans to do this in the autumn 2008 once it has employed new support officers.
- 4.30 In 2006/07, 9.8% of the Council's tenancies were terminated, which is higher than the national figure of 9.5%. The Council's figure increased in 2007/08 to

- 10.1%. The Council told us that this is a result of its regeneration activities. Currently, the Council still has 891 properties to demolish as part of its regeneration programme, and this will continue to impact on the number of its tenancies that are terminated.
- 4.31 In April 2008 the Council introduced a routine feedback survey to find out the reasons for its tenants moving. This includes some useful information on how good the outgoing tenants thought their area was and the condition of their home, although the Council has not analysed this information at an estate level. This limits the usefulness of this information as a future planning tool.
- 4.32 The Council has clear and comprehensive procedures for its staff to follow when dealing with abandoned properties. In 2007/08, 112 or 0.8% of its tenants abandoned their tenancies.
- 4.33 In 2007/08 the Council issued 2,380 Notice of Proceedings for Possession (NOPs), of which 2,371 were for rent arrears and 9 were for antisocial behaviour. This is down on the previous year, 2006/07, when it issued 3,792 NOPs. The Council evicted 166 of its tenants in 2007/08, up from 135 in 2006/07. In 2006/07, the Council recovered vacant possession of 0.9% of its housing stock, three times the national figure of 0.3%. In 2007/08, it increased its recovery rate to 1.2%. The Council told us that this is a result of it improving its management of rent arrears.
- 4.34 We found that the Council does not routinely sign up tenants to a new SST where it has made a decision not to recover vacant possession. It does not have clear guidelines for its management of occupancy after it has obtained a recovery order. As we report above, the Council is planning to increase its use of SSSTs for people it has evicted for arrears but who it allows to remain in their home.
- 4.35 The Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004, places a duty upon Local Authorities and Chief Constables to prepare a joint antisocial behaviour strategy. Renfrewshire Council's strategy, published in 2005, sets out a multi-agency approach to responding to incidents of antisocial behaviour (ASB). This also

- includes arrangements for regular monitoring, review and evaluation of the strategy by the Council and its partners.
- 4.36 The Council's staff in the neighbourhood offices deal with low level neighbour nuisance in its own housing stock. The Council aims to become involved at an early stage in neighbour disputes and it seeks to mediate in disputes between neighbours to prevent future more serious incidents. The Council publicises the service well in its tenant newsletters, the local press, through a range of leaflets available in its offices. Its Mediation and Anti Social Behaviour information pack includes a wide range of information including formal service standards for the Council's Antisocial Investigation and Support Team (ASIST).
- 4.37 The ASIST deals with serious ASB cases, across all housing tenures. In 2007/08, it dealt with 2736 referrals; 712 of which were referred from the Council's neighbourhood offices. The Council also made 95 referrals to mediation services, and in 2006/07 the Council obtained seven Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). It obtained nine in 2005/06.
- 4.38 The Council has good procedures to guide staff dealing with ASB, and it maintains good records of its actions. It has an effective ICT system for logging all ASB complaints. We saw that the Council agrees action plans with complainers and it makes effective use of the PEER (Prevention, Early intervention, Enforcement and Rehabilitation) approach to resolve incidents of ASB.
- 4.39 Following the completion of its investigations and intervention, the Council asks users of its ASB services to complete a satisfaction survey. It reports the results annually and compares these with the previous years. The Council also carried out a survey of users of the antisocial behaviour service in 2007: 88% of respondents who used its helpline were satisfied with the advice given; 80% were satisfied that they were kept up to date with what was happening; and, 76% felt that their situation had improved as a result of the Council's investigations and intervention.

- 4.40 The Council works with partners at both strategic and operational levels, including an early referral scheme to Victim Support for people who suffer from incidents of antisocial behaviour. Overall, the Council's management of antisocial behaviour is a major strength.
- 4.41 The Council operates a community warden scheme in most of its neighbourhoods: approximately 70% of its tenants live in areas covered by the scheme. The wardens' duties include:
- reporting repairs;
  - reporting incidents of antisocial behaviour;
  - dealing with minor neighbour disputes;
  - checking empty houses; and
  - reassuring vulnerable tenants.
- 4.42 We saw that the Council's wardens are involved in a number of diversionary initiatives with young people in the estates they cover including the Junior Wardens, Fire Reach and Hit the Beat. The Council has recently reviewed the role of community wardens and it intends to give them the authority to issue fixed penalty notices for litter and dog fouling offences. However, we saw that consultation with tenants and service users over the proposed changes in the service was limited.
- 4.43 The Council has a comprehensive set of policies and procedures for the management of its estates. We saw that following a peer review by the Scottish Housing Best Value Network, the Council introduced a comprehensive management framework including an innovative approach involving the use of hand held portable computers by staff carrying out estate management inspections.
- 4.44 The Council sets out the standards it expects its estates to reach in a number of documents. Its estate management framework allows the Council to regularly monitor the condition of estates. It works well with partners and tenants where action is required and monitors the outcomes of any proposed remedial action.

- 4.45 The Council conducts annual ward inspections attended by the local tenants and residents associations, local elected members and its officers. Through these inspections it identifies and records areas of concern as well as highlighting potential local improvements. It then refers issues to the appropriate service provider for consideration and agrees a local action plan with local residents. This is a good approach. The Council produces progress updates on the local action plans, although it does not routinely inform all local tenants about these.
- 4.46 We saw that a number of the Council's estates are in good condition, although others are poorer. The Council's own survey of its tenants in 2007 reported that 83% of respondents are very satisfied or satisfied with their neighbourhood. We saw that the volume of outstanding external repairs to its houses detracted considerably from the appearance of a number of the Council's estates. This view was confirmed local residents that we spoke to.
- 4.47 In summary, the Council provides an excellent range of information on tenancy and neighbourhood management. The Council is good at dealing with antisocial behaviour, sustaining tenancies and identifying the support needs of vulnerable tenants. It evicts relatively high numbers of its tenants and it has some weaknesses in its management of post-decree occupancy. The Council manages its neighbourhoods well, although some are in poorer condition.

### Income maximisation

- 4.48 Renfrewshire Council offers tenants a range of methods to pay their rent and has good information on how its tenants pay their rent. These methods include:
- at its offices;
  - through the Post Office;
  - by PayPoint;
  - by cheque or postal order;
  - debit and credit cards on-line and by telephone; and
  - by direct debit.

4.49 The table below summarises Renfrewshire Council’s performance in collecting rent.

	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08*
	Council	National	Council	National	Council
Current tenant arrears as % of net rent due	12.9%	7.0%	11.6%	6.7%	10.5%
% of current tenants in serious arrears	8.1%	4.5%	8.1%	4.4%	n/a*
Total former tenant arrears (£)	815,100	n/a	1,303,900	n/a	n/a*
Rent arrears written off (£)	673,900	n/a	427,300	n/a	n/a*

Source: Audit Scotland’s published performance indicators & the Council’s inspection submission

\* March 2008 figures not yet reported or validated

4.50 The Council’s published performance in collecting its tenants’ rent has shown a consistent improvement over the last three years. Its rate of improvement is better than that for the national figures, although its performance remains poor in comparison to national figures. In 2006/07 the Council was ranked 24<sup>th</sup> out of the 27 Scottish local authorities managing houses at that time.

4.51 The Council has been successful in preventing new tenants getting into arrears. It has identified a number of groups who are vulnerable to arrears for targeted action. We also saw that the Council refers tenants in rent arrears to local advice and support organisations. The Council acted promptly to improve its audit trail for arrears management following our feedback on gaps and weaknesses in its record management. The Council has a relatively high proportion of its tenants in serious arrears.

4.52 The Council’s 2007 satisfaction survey asked if tenants were or had been in rent arrears; 22% of respondents to the survey, or 264 tenants, stated that they have been, or are currently in, rent arrears. When asked about the Council’s advice and assistance in managing their rent arrears, 67% of respondents said that they found it very useful, 17% stated that they found it slightly useful and 8% found it of no help at all.

4.53 The Council’s level of former tenant rent arrears has increased over the three years to £1,303,909 in 2006/07. This has, in part, been a consequence of the Council’s relatively high levels of evictions and is a factor in its reduction of current tenant arrears. While this is a significant weakness, the Council has recognised that its performance in recovering rent arrears owed by former tenants is poor and has taken recent steps to address this as part of a corporate approach to debt recovery.

4.54 The table below summarises Renfrewshire Council’s reported performance in letting houses that have become empty.

	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08*
	Council	National	Council	National	Council*
Turnover (no. of new vacancies as % of total dwellings)	7.4%	9.3%	9.8%	9.5%	10.1%
Total no. of re-lets	1,530	n/a	1,407	n/a	1,409
Total no. of re-lets that were not low demand	1,316	n/a	1,262	n/a	899
% of dwellings that were not low demand re-let within 4 weeks	48.1%	44.2%	46.6%	47.7%	55.3%
Average time (days) to re-let houses that are not low demand	42	64	54	51	47
% of total annual rental due lost due to voids	2.9%	2.3%	3.8%	1.9%	3.5%

Source: Audit Scotland’s published performance indicators and the Council’s inspection submission  
 \* March 2008 figures not yet reported or validated

4.55 In 2006/07 the Council lost 3.8% of its total rental income because of empty houses and this was above the national figure of 1.9%. It improved its performance in 2007/08 to 3.5%, although it is not matching the improvement trend in the national figures. At the time of our inspection the Council had 259 empty houses, 84 of which were held pending the decision to demolish or dispose of them as part of an Area Development Framework. These properties represent a significant element of the income the Council is losing as a result of empty houses.

- 4.56 The Council reported that it took an average of 48 days to let empty houses in 2007/08, down from 55 days in 2006/07. A relatively high number of houses are exempt from calculation of days void due to major repairs, electrical and asbestos related works, while the property involved is unsafe. The Council told us that planned programmes of work, already in place, will reduce the number of properties held for major repairs at void stage in the future.
- 4.57 In summary, the Council's performance in income maximisation is fair. It is improving its performance in current tenant arrears, although its management of former tenant arrears is poor. Its performance in letting its empty houses has improved slightly in the last year, although it remains poor relative to national figures.

## 5. How well is Renfrewshire Council managing its assets and delivering repairs?

In this section we set out our assessment of the Council's performance in managing its housing assets and in delivering a repairs service for tenants.

### Grade

Renfrewshire Council has achieved a **C** grade for asset management and repairs. This is a **fair** performance.

- 5.1 Our assessment is that Renfrewshire's Council's performance in its asset management and repairs has some strengths, but set against these are a number of weaknesses, some of which are significant. We saw that its responsive repairs service is accessible, it collects good feedback information from tenants, its relet standard and its performance in completing repairs to empty houses are good. The Council's performance in carrying out Emergency Repairs is good. It is also good at managing asbestos in its houses.
- 5.2 The Council is developing its approach to the strategic management of its housing assets. It has a good asset management ICT system although it has weaknesses in its stock condition information. It is not fully complying with legal and regulatory duties in gas safety and Right to Repair, although we saw that it is improving. Its performance information for responsive repairs is not wholly reliable and it does not effectively involve tenants in how it delivers its repairs and maintenance services. Since 2007 the Council has deferred carrying out certain responsive repairs reported by its tenants. Its current procurement practices do not demonstrate a focus on value for money.

### Tenant satisfaction

- 5.3 The Council's 2007 tenant satisfaction survey found that:
- 83% of respondents were satisfied with the overall repairs service they received, while 10% were dissatisfied; and
  - 89% of respondents were satisfied with quality of repairs, while 7% were dissatisfied.

## Asset management strategy and planning

- 5.4 The Council does not currently have an agreed strategic approach to asset management for its housing stock. It has recently approved a Corporate Property Asset Management Strategy and its Housing and Property Management staff are now using this to develop a complimentary strategy for the Council's housing assets.
- 5.5 The Council outlines its existing strategic objectives in its Local Housing Strategy (LHS), Strategic Housing Improvement Plan (SHIP) and Housing and Property Management's Service Improvement Plan. In particular the Service Improvement Plan reflects the Council's challenges for the next three years and includes the following broad aims:
- secure long term housing investment;
  - improve quality and service standards;
  - improve the quality and effectiveness of asset management; and
  - increase productivity and efficiency.
- 5.6 Beyond this, the Council does not have a clear strategic approach to investment planning. As we report above, the Council is aware of a number of challenges it faces to fund the investment needed to bring its houses up to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by the Ministerial target of 2015. At the time of our inspection, the Council was discussing the possibility of financial support with the Scottish Government to help it put in place a sustainable long term funding package. However, regardless of this uncertainty around funding, it is a weakness that the Council has not yet prepared an investment strategy or identified and agreed investment priorities.
- 5.7 The Council has a good approach to assessing the sustainability of its stock. The demolitions carried out by the Council prior to 2001 were a response to local circumstances. The Council now has a comprehensive Regeneration Strategy, procedure and programme of demolition for surplus housing stock. It clearly links its needs analysis to sustainability and the demolition programme. The Council uses its Estate Actions Plans to closely monitor neighbourhoods, individual

- streets and specific buildings. It carries out basic option appraisals to make decisions on the future sustainability of its housing stock.
- 5.8 The Council has a good understanding of the information it has on the current and future needs and demands for its housing stock. It carried out a Renfrewshire Housing Needs Analysis in 2003 as a key element underpinning the proposal to transfer its houses to Renfrewshire Housing Association. The Council acknowledges that it needs to extend and update this information and it aims to commission a further study in 2008/09. The Council does not have comprehensive information on the scale and housing needs of BME communities in its area, and plans to commission a survey to gather this information later this year.
- 5.9 The Council has had only limited engagement with its tenants to identify their priorities for investment in their homes. It consulted tenants on their preferences for investment priorities as part of the stock transfer ballot preparations in 2006. At that time tenants indicated that their preference was to have new bathrooms installed, followed by kitchens. The Council has not yet fully reflected its tenants' preferences when drawing up its investment programmes. The Council has now told us that it will allocate around £400,000 to replace bathrooms in the present financial year, 2008/09.
- 5.10 Over the last year the Council has started to involve tenants in the planning of its proposed programme of investment works. This group of tenants has evolved from one the Council formed to consider its plans for achieving the SHQS. The structure of this new tenant group is evolving further and it will in future monitor the Council's housing investment and SHQS compliance.
- 5.11 The Council actively involves tenants through its Neighbourhood Forums in suggesting works required to address environmental issues in their area. It provides a separate budget to fund this type of work. This is a good approach, although the budget is restricted.

- 5.12 Scottish Ministers have set a target that all social landlords' houses should meet the SHQS by 2015. At the time of our inspection, the Council did not have an agreed Standard Delivery Plan (SDP). This is in part a consequence of the termination of the Council's stock transfer proposal, and the Council has been discussing the way forward for its investment plans with the Scottish Government over the last year. We discuss this further, along with the financial challenges the Council faces in meeting the SHQS, at *Efficiency and value for money* in section 7.
- 5.13 The Council has invested in its houses, although in 2007/08 it invested around £400 less per house than the average for Scottish councils. Its priorities for capital investment in the last four years have included kitchens, central heating systems, window replacements, electrical re-wiring, re-rendering and re-roofing. However, this investment has not had a significant impact on the number of its houses that meet the SHQS. At present, the Council cannot demonstrate that it is planning its current investment programme to address the SHQS elements as a priority, so that it will meet the SHQS in all its houses by 2015. Its current investment programme is for one year only, although it plans to develop a long term investment programme once it has confirmed the available financial resources
- 5.14 The Council has recently implemented a comprehensive ICT asset management system which enables it to hold its available stock information on a single database and is interfaced with the Council's response repairs system. This, together with its development of a housing asset management strategy, should provide the Council with a good framework for the effective management of its housing assets.
- 5.15 During our inspection, the Council acknowledged that it had weaknesses in its housing stock condition information. It has populated its new ICT system with cloned data from the stock condition survey it carried out in 2004. This sample survey was for the purpose of the proposed stock transfer and covered approximately 10% of the Council's houses. The Council is currently working to develop its knowledge of its stock condition; it has updated its information from

ad-hoc surveys to reflect improvements and investment in its stock since the initial 2004 survey; it plans to commission a further 10% supplementary sample survey later this year; and, intends to repeat this exercise annually. This will help the Council to reduce its reliance on cloned data, but at its current planned rate it will be a number of years before the Council will have a comprehensive database on the condition of its houses. However, there are inaccuracies and inconsistencies with the current information in the new system and this raises questions around the accuracy of the Council's assessment of the works required to meet the SHQS and the associated costs.

5.16 The Council's current approach to planning its investment programme presents a number of risks to it meeting the SHQS:

- It does not always prioritise works required to meet the SHQS. For example, the Council has committed significant resources to re-roof and re-render properties, yet there is little evidence that this investment is bringing these houses up to the SHQS.
- It relies overly on standard lifecycles for major property elements in its investment programme assumptions, rather than on actual need for repair.
- It does not install new kitchens in the homes of tenants with current rent arrears until their debt is cleared. This is delaying the installation of kitchens until an unknown date.
- It will need to secure the co-operation of large numbers of owners in mixed tenure, flatted blocks if all of its properties are to be brought up to SHQS.
- It is currently assuming 100% compliance and has made no provision for exemptions from the SHQS. It is unrealistic for the Council to assume that it can cost effectively bring all its properties up to SHQS.

5.17 Taken together with the weaknesses in its stock condition information, these factors mean that the Council is not well placed to effectively plan for the achievement of the SHQS or to accurately assess the level of investment needed.

5.18 The Council does not monitor or regularly report to elected members how many properties it is bringing up to SHQS each year. It does not currently have

- accurate numbers on how many of its houses meet the SHQS. This is a weakness.
- 5.19 In summary, the Council is now developing a more strategic approach to the management of its housing assets, although at present it does not have effective strategic planning for its housing investment. The Council recognises the importance of holding good information on its stock and its new ICT system is an effective tool for this work. The Council is working towards enhancing its currently limited condition information on its houses and this is an important factor in its difficulty to plan for the achievement of the SHQS.

### Investment & home safety

- 5.20 The Council spent £17.9m on capital works to its houses in 2005/06 and £23.8m in 2006/07, including Early Action funding, with its average per house investment above that for Scottish councils as a whole in both years. However, in 2007/08 the Council reduced its expenditure by nearly 30% to around £400 less per house than the average for Scottish councils.
- 5.21 The Council monitors its capital programme on a regular basis. However, while it actively plans for reserve works, it reported an underspend of £2.3m (9.8%) in 2006/07. We saw that the Council is not always delivering its planned annual capital programme or spending all its available investment budget, although its recent performance in this area has improved.
- 5.22 The Council provides good information to tenants who have investment work done to their homes. Tenants speak directly to Council staff regarding the proposed works, and it arranges for its tenants to have a choice of design layout and colour in its kitchen replacements. Until recently the Council only issued satisfaction surveys to tenants after the installation of a new kitchen. During our inspection the Council confirmed that it will now issue satisfaction surveys to tenants, and where appropriate to owners, on all other works contracts covered in the investment programme. To date, the Council has not routinely analysed or reported the results from completed satisfaction surveys. As a result, the Council

- does not know if residents are satisfied with the specification, standard of the completed works or the performance of the contractor. This is a weakness.
- 5.23 The Council currently programmes cyclical maintenance work for one year only. It has not included in the programme resources to carry out cleaning or repairs to gutters or external paint work. It has been a number of years since the Council has routinely included this type of work in its cyclical maintenance programme. As we report below, it is also deferring response repairs for this type of work. The Council recognises that its current programme has gaps and includes only works where the Council has legal obligations.
- 5.24 By law, Renfrewshire Council must make safety checks every 12 months on all gas appliances and flues that it provides for its tenants. The table below summarises the Council's performance in carrying out gas safety checks.

	June 2008	
	No. of houses	% of houses
Houses with gas appliances	9,780*	-
Houses with current gas safety certificates	9,131	98.8%
Houses where safety check was carried out within 12 months of previous check	Not available	-
Houses where safety check was carried out up to one month after the due date	Not available	-
Houses where safety check was carried out between one and three months after the due date	Not available	-
Houses where safety check was carried out more than three months after the due date	Not available	-

\*gas supplies to 539 of these properties are capped and therefore have not been included in the calculation of the percentage of properties requiring a gas certificate.

- 5.25 The Council has improved its performance in gas safety, although it is not yet fully meeting its statutory duties on gas safety for some of its houses. In March 2007 it reported that it had current gas safety certificates for just over 80% of its houses with gas. By June 2008, it had increased this to 98.8%. However, at the time of our inspection, the Council did not know how many of these houses had continuous certificate cover. This is a weakness. During the inspection the Council began to monitor and report on this figure following our feedback, and found that 81% had continuous cover. Each year the Council has around 8% of its gas safety checks quality assured.

- 5.26 The Council has recently improved its approach to gas safety by introducing a new procedure, and it has started to offer gas safety appointments to tenants, including at weekends and evenings.
- 5.27 The Council has increasingly found instances where tenants are unable to pay for gas. The Council has taken the decision in these cases to ensure that gas supplies are appropriately capped to ensure the safety of its tenants. It also offers a next day service to re-connect supplies, if requested. The Council is currently investigating ways to involve money counsellors to improve the situation.
- 5.28 From May 2004 social landlords have had a statutory duty to manage asbestos in the common areas of their properties and to produce an asbestos management plan. The Council has an asbestos management plan and has conducted surveys in all common areas of its housing. It has undertaken annual inspections of the condition of asbestos in its common areas for the last two years. The Council has an asbestos register, updated with the results of annual inspections, available to all staff on its internal computer system. All the Council's Building Services' staff have received asbestos awareness training and Building Services have a working procedure in place to help ensure its staff who are likely to come into contact with asbestos know about its location and condition. The Council gives tenants information on asbestos in its "Reporting your repairs" booklet and encourages them to contact it if they find damaged asbestos.
- 5.29 The Council has a good relet standard and ready to let empty houses we saw were in good condition. The Council provides all prospective tenants with clear guidance on the standard of its let houses and has a usefully illustrated booklet to help tenants visualise key standards. The Council collects feedback from new tenants on the condition of their new homes and collates information on refusals. We found that the Council is not always accurately recording refusal reasons. However, we saw that the Council reacted positively when this feedback revealed a significant level of dissatisfaction among new tenants with the condition of gardens at the time of letting. The Council now arranges a first cut of

grass for all newly let properties. This action has led to a reduction in complaints from new tenants.

- 5.30 In summary, the Council lets its houses to a good standard. It is good at managing asbestos in its houses. The Council currently has a weakness around its management of gas safety and, although it is improving, it does not yet fully meet its statutory obligation for all its houses with gas.

### Response repairs

- 5.31 The Council's response repairs service is provided by the Council's Building Services. It operates this on the basis of a contract first agreed in 1997, and Building Services has provided both the contractor and client monitoring functions since 2002. An organisational re-structure of Building Services was approved by the Council in April 2008. Managers within Building Services are now working to develop a more robust client and service development role.
- 5.32 The Council's response repairs service is accessible. Tenants can report repairs by telephone to the Council's customer contact centre and emergency repairs directly to Building Services. The Council's information shows that 92% of tenant contact the repairs service by telephone through the customer contact centre, while 6% use the freephones it provides in its local housing offices. Tenants we spoke to thought that access to the repairs service was good, although the Council has not asked tenants if they find it easy to report repairs. The Council does not have information on its tenants that would allow it to appropriately tailor its services to vulnerable individuals or people with particular needs
- 5.33 The Council provides good information on its repairs service to tenants in a range of ways including in its tenant handbook, on its website, in its "Reporting your repairs" booklet and in other publications it provides to tenants. The Council uses repair finder diagrams in its "Reporting your repairs" booklet and similar electronic version on its website to help tenants identify and report repairs.
- 5.34 The Council offers a morning/afternoon appointment system for tenants requesting non emergency plumbing, joinery and electrical repairs. The number

of appointments requested by tenants has dropped over the last three years from 11,484 in 2005/06 to 7,454 in 2007/08. The Council has not investigated the reasons for this reduction in the numbers of requested appointments. The Council told us that it was introducing a work scheduling feature to its ICT system which would allow more appointments to be offered to more tenants. The Council has shown tenant representatives its plans for work scheduling, but has not involved tenants more broadly in the development of the response repairs service. The Council does not routinely monitor its performance in keeping appointments. During our inspection it reviewed this for a one week sample of appointments, and found that it had kept 91% of appointments made and attended all the repairs on the correct day.

5.35 The Council's targets for completing repairs are: 24 hours for emergencies; 4 working days for urgent repairs; 12 working days for routine repairs; and, 30 working days for normal repairs. The table below summarises the Council's reported performance in completing response repairs within its target timescales compared to national median performance.

	Target response time	Performance			
		2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	National median 2006/07
<b>Emergency</b>	24 hours	98.7%	98.5%	99.0%	94.1%
<b>Urgent</b>	4 working days	94.6%	89.8%	90.0%	87.9%
<b>Routine</b>	12 working days	90.2%	89.6%	91.3%	89.1%
<b>Normal</b>	30 working days	86.7%	88.2%	83.7%	85.1%
<b>% of repairs due to be completed within 24 hours completed within target</b>		98.7%	98.5%	99.0%	93.9%
<b>% of all repairs completed in target</b>		91.0%	92.6%	91.7%	89.4%

Source: Audit Scotland's published performance indicators & the Council's inspection submission

5.36 The Council's reported performance is good in comparison to national medians. However, we found that the Council's figures do not accurately represent its tenants' experience of the service because of the way it records and reports follow-on repairs. These are incomplete repairs which the Council reorders. It then records the original repair as completed in target and measures its performance for the follow-on repair from the date the second order was raised. The Council categorised 3,793 repairs as follow-on repairs in 2007/08, or around 7% of all its repairs. This is a weakness.

- 5.37 The Council has not carried out just under 800 responsive repairs requested by its tenants. These relate mainly to gutters, fencing and door entry systems. It told its tenants these repairs had been deferred to build up a cyclical maintenance programme of work. However, at the time of our inspection the Council had not developed this cyclical programme and some tenants have been awaiting repairs for almost two years. Tenants we spoke to were frustrated with what they saw as a lack of information available to them, for example on deferred repairs or common repairs. This is a weakness.
- 5.38 Most repairs the Council does it classifies as emergencies or normal. Normal repairs account for around 40% of all its repairs, and this is the category in which the Council has its poorest performance and this declined in 2007/08 .
- 5.39 The Council issues a repair confirmation to all tenants reporting repairs other than those involving common works and this contains information on timescales and work to be done. While we were on site the Council began to also send repair confirmation slips to people reporting common repairs.
- 5.40 The Council does not give adequate details of the statutory Right to Repair scheme when tenants report a qualifying repair. We found other weaknesses in the Council compliance with its statutory duties on the Right to Repair. It does not:
- publicise the scheme annually; and
  - always accurately identify all qualifying repairs.

The Council acknowledged this significant weakness during our inspection and changed the standard script used by its Call Centre operatives, including giving alternative contractor details and it has arranged to publicise the Right to Repair scheme.

- 5.41 Pre and post inspections are important ways of ensuring that repairs are carried out to a high standard and targeted accurately. The Council has a 5% target for pre inspections of all repairs; although it is currently inspecting around 24% of its normal category of repairs. The Council is keen to reduce the number of pre

- inspections, but it has no current strategy to achieve this and is not currently targeting its inspections effectively. The Council does not routinely monitor or report on its performance against its pre inspection targets, although we saw that it completed around 41% of normal repair pre-inspections out with its five day target and that this performance is worsening. We saw the Council took the opportunity of being in tenant's homes to identify other repairs; this is a service user focussed approach.
- 5.42 The Council recognises that it needs to focus its post inspections more closely on the quality of repairs as experienced by tenants. The Council currently targets 30% of its repairs for post inspection; it achieved 11% in 2007/08. We saw examples where the Council's post inspection process had not identified poor quality repairs or unfinished work.
- 5.43 The Council uses a range of information to select repairs for post inspection including, a random number of repairs in all categories, jobs with cost variations of more than 20% and on receipt of critical tenant feedback. The Council does not select specific areas of its repairs service either by trade or contractor for post inspection. The Council has no target time for the completion of post inspections. We also found that it does not use information gained from its inspections to identify potential improvements to its repairs service.
- 5.44 The responsibility for reporting performance in repairs rests with the Council's Building Services Department. It is aware of the need for a robust internal challenge mechanism to help deliver and improve the repairs service, and is presently re-structuring to ensure a greater client focus in repairs.
- 5.45 In summary, the Council's response repairs service is accessible and its performance in completing repairs is relatively good. However, it has weaknesses in its performance information, its use of inspections and it does not fully comply with the statutory requirements of the Right to Repair scheme.

## Value for money in procurement

- 5.46 The Council delivers its responsive repairs service through its in-house partner, Building Services. It also provides empty house repairs, planned maintenance and some capital investment contracts. The Council gives Building Services contracts worth around half of the total HRA budget for repairs and maintenance. The original Measured Term Contract between Housing Services and Building Services, covered the period from July 1997 to June 2000, with an option to extend the contract for up to two years. The Council extended the contract in 2000 and 2001. At the end of this period the Council took the decision to further extend the arrangement for an additional year to June 2003, and again in 2003 to the end of March 2004. In 2004, it extended the contract for a two year period in order to allow it to carry out a Best Value Review of the service. We found no evidence that the Council formally reviewed and considered the quality of the service provided by Building Services and whether it continued to represent value for money when it made decision to extend the contract arrangements. Following the Best Value Review in 2005, which it reported on in February 2006, the Council agreed to continue with Building Services as the provider of its repairs and maintenance services.
- 5.47 The Council has not put in place a Service Level Agreement or other form of contract document to define the arrangements for this commercial relationship. It has founded the present arrangements on the Schedule of Rates (SOR) it first used in 1997, uplifted to reflect inflation. It has not comprehensively reviewed the items or associated costs in the SOR beyond the addition of new items and some limited benchmarking. This limits the ability of the Council to demonstrate that this arrangement represents value for money and is a weakness. We found evidence that the Council has however agreed with Building Services comprehensive targets for future efficiencies, cost savings and continuous improvements to the service delivered to tenants, through its agreed annual Business Plan.
- 5.48 For its kitchen replacement contract, the Council negotiated terms with its Building Services in 2004. It initially tested the local market and then negotiated with Building Services to carry out the works at the comparable rates. It agreed

- these contracts on an area basis. Since 2004, the Council has continued with this contract with rates increased annually to reflect inflation rises. However, we saw no evidence that the Council is testing the continuation of this contract on value for money or in response to tenants' feedback to its post completion satisfaction surveys.
- 5.49 The Council has spent almost half of its maintenance budget on response repairs over the last two years with 36% on empty house and 14% on planned maintenance. In 2007/08, 40% of repairs the Council did were emergencies, the most expensive category of response repair. The Council has not reviewed the balance of its response repairs to planned maintenance or its usage of high cost repair categories, although its development of an asset management strategy gives it an opportunity to do this.
- 5.50 The Council cancelled 10,561 repairs in 2007/08, around 12% of all repairs. It cancelled around 50% of these because the tenant had not provided access. The Council hopes to improve this performance by increasing the number of appointments made through its new work scheduling approach. The Council currently varies around 50% of its repairs and the additional cost of variations amounted to £1,564,454 in 2007/08. The Council told us that it expected a level of variation as it encouraged its operatives to add work to existing lines to improve the tenant's experience of its repairs service. However, it has not regularly reviewed its Schedule of Rates with a view to reducing these variations. This means it is difficult for the Council to use variation figures as an aid to improvement in repairs identification or in budget monitoring.
- 5.51 The Council has not involved tenants in developing its procurement strategy and options or in selecting individual contractors.
- 5.52 Historically, the Council has carried out its capital works as single projects. It is presently investigating the potential for using more modern forms of procurement to deliver cost savings and efficiencies, though it was too early for us to review the effectiveness of these proposals.

5.53 In summary, the Council does a high number of emergency repairs and its variations are substantial. The absence of robust independent scrutiny of its contractor is a risk for the Council in demonstrating control of its expenditure. It has a commitment to develop more modern approaches to procurement for its contracts, but its current practices do not demonstrate a focus on value for money. The Council is planning improvement in this area, although it was too early for us to confirm the effectiveness of these proposals.

## 6. How well is Renfrewshire Council delivering services for homeless people?

In this section we set out our assessment of the Council's performance in delivering services for homeless people.

### Grade

Renfrewshire Council has achieved a **C** grade for services to homeless people. This is a **fair** performance.

- 6.1 Our overall assessment is that Renfrewshire Council has some strengths in the delivery of its homelessness service, but also some areas where improvement is required which impact directly on the quality of services to homeless people.
- 6.2 The Council has made good progress in reducing its use of bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation; it has a robust approach to the homelessness assessment process; and it has a number of good initiatives that help to prevent homelessness.
- 6.3 It also has a number of weaknesses in the service, some of which are significant:
- the Council does not have sufficient awareness of how applicants access its service;
  - the Council has used interviewing facilities that are not private;
  - the Council did not put sufficient safeguards in place when it changed the way in which it deals with advice only cases;
  - the Council is advising some people of likely non priority decisions prior to the individual making a homelessness application; and
  - there are weaknesses in the Council's approach to providing temporary accommodation.

### Access to service

- 6.4 Renfrewshire Council received 1,081 applications for assistance from homeless people in 2007/08. This equates to 1.3% of all households in Renfrewshire and is around half of the national figure of 2.5%. Homeless applications to the Council in 2007/08 decreased by 35%, from 1,663 in 2006/07. This reduction is partly due to the Council changing its practice in April 2007 on recording

- separately those homeless people it gives advice and assistance only. However, over the same period, the number of households that the Council accepted that it had a statutory duty to house increased from 667 to 785.
- 6.5 The Council delivers its homelessness service from a Housing Advice Centre based in Paisley and through weekly surgeries in Renfrew and Johnstone. It provides a responsive walk-in interview service to help it minimise the time it takes to see people. The Housing Advice Centre moved to a temporary office in the centre of Paisley in March 2008, prior to its planned relocation to new premises in the autumn of 2008. The temporary Housing Advice Centre is well located, but has a number of weaknesses that affect the quality of service the Council delivers to homeless people around privacy, accessibility and waiting times. We also found that service users with restricted mobility are likely to find it difficult to access the building.
- 6.6 The Council immediately acted to improve facilities for homeless people approaching the service, particularly privacy, following our feedback during the inspection. The Council has also continued to interview people in an alternative office location with private interview rooms when an applicant requests this.
- 6.7 As reported above, since April 2007, the Council has separately recorded people who approach the service and it gives advice and assistance to. It recorded 792 such applications during 2007/08. The Council did not analyse the potential impact of this change for service users before it introduced it, nor did it put in place any quality assurance processes to help it manage this service. We found inconsistencies in how the Council provided the service and it places the onus on people approaching it to actively request a homelessness assessment. We also found that the Council did not proceed with relevant enquiries for a number of people who may have been homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- 6.8 The Council acknowledged that it needed to address these issues and quickly took steps to do so. Its actions included the immediate introduction of a quality assurance process for advice only cases, commissioning a comprehensive

analysis of outcomes for recent advice only cases, and the introduction of an advice checklist for all clients who do not make a homelessness application.

- 6.9 The Council's website has a good range of information about homelessness. It recently introduced a systematic approach to the distribution of homelessness publicity material, and now checks with those agencies it sends posters to that they remain on display. However, we found that the Council had only sent a limited range of literature to its partner agencies. We also found that the Council does not adequately display homelessness information in its neighbourhood offices and its posters publicising the out-of-hours service were not always clearly visible when its offices were closed.
- 6.10 The Council provides an emergency out-of-hours service to help homeless people. The Council records details of all calls made to the out-of-hours service and monitors calls to the service on a monthly basis. It received 241 calls in 2007/08 and provided 97 households with emergency accommodation. The Council is currently reviewing its out-of-hours service in order to address weaknesses it had previously identified, and it responded to our feedback by improving its recording and use of performance information in this area.
- 6.11 The Council does not record, monitor or report initial approaches to the service. The Council's walk-in interview service will partly moderate the impact of this, but it does not know:
- how long it takes to interview people who choose to make an appointment;
  - how many applicants it loses contact with prior to their interview; and
  - how people access its service.

The Council introduced a presentation log to tackle this significant weakness following our feedback, although it was too early to test the effectiveness of this.

- 6.12 The Council has recently introduced an access and prevention referral protocol for hospital patients with mental health problems. At the time of our inspection it was too early for us to assess how well this is working. The Council plans to develop a similar protocol for residents in acute in-patient services during

- 6.13 The Council has good arrangements for translating its homelessness documents into community languages and we saw this working well. Following our feedback, the Council introduced hearing loops to its interview booths.
- 6.14 In summary, the Council provides a responsive walk-in interview service to help it minimise the time it takes to see people, but has a range of weaknesses that impact on overall access to its homelessness service. The Council responded quickly to address these issues as part of its ongoing improvement process and this contributes to our overall assessment that access to the homelessness service is fair.

#### Advice and prevention

- 6.15 Renfrewshire Council sets out its approach to preventing homelessness in its homelessness strategy for 2003 to 2008. The Council is currently working with partners and service users to update its strategy. The Council has told us that its prevention work will form a more significant part of its updated strategy, which will reflect the increasing work it is doing in this area. The Council is currently restructuring its homelessness team, partly to achieve a clearer focus on prevention and support.
- 6.16 The level of repeat presentations to the Council fell from 11.2% in 2006/07 to 6.9% in 2007/08. A significant factor in this change is likely to be the Council's change to its practice on recording advice and assistance only cases: it no longer records these as homeless applications. We also found a small number of cases where applicants' most recent homeless application was not accurately recorded; however, the Council acted quickly to address this by providing additional staff guidance and training.
- 6.17 In 2007/08, 115 applications (around 10% of all applications) were from homeless people who the Council found to be non-priority or intentionally homeless. The Council told us that it refers all these applicants to the local

Citizens Advice Bureau, which it contracts to provide an enhanced advice and assistance service. The Council records referrals on individual applicants' case notes, but it does not carry out any analysis of these referrals. It does not always record the outcomes for those it refers and so cannot demonstrate that it is always discharging its duty to these applicants, although we did see examples of applicants being given good advice and assistance. The Council is reviewing the way in which it delivers its enhanced advice and assistance service in the autumn of 2008. These changes should address the issues that we have raised.

6.18 The Council provides a wide range of services to help prevent homelessness and the recurrence of homelessness. The following are a selection of initiatives that the Council uses to prevent homelessness:

- HomePoint training for its homelessness staff;
- a Youth Homeless Prevention Outreach Worker;
- furnished tenancy grants;
- the New Start Project, for people from Renfrewshire whose imprisonment may lead to homelessness;
- a rent deposit guarantee scheme;
- the Gallowhill Tenancy Support Service;
- family mediation; and
- Barnardo's Paisley Threads, a local support service for young people.

6.19 The Council also works to sustain tenancies by providing housing support to homeless people, assisting them to access furniture, and by visiting all new tenants. Between 2005/06 and 2007/08 the percentage of homeless people housed by the Council who were still in their tenancies a year later increased from 74% to 76%. This compares to 87% for all new tenants. This means that previously homeless people have been less successful than other tenants in sustaining their tenancies. This has been a consistent pattern for the last three years. The Council has not analysed tenancy termination information to understand the reasons its tenants give up their homes, although it told us that it plans to do so.

6.20 The Council has good working arrangements to ensure that its Customer Finance Team refers all its tenants who are at risk of eviction to the Homeless Prevention Officer. At the time of our inspection, it did not have an agreed referrals process for tenants of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) who were at risk of eviction and is yet to develop prevention measures for owner-occupiers at risk of losing their homes.

6.21 In summary, the Council's approach to providing advice and preventing homelessness is fair and improving. It has a good range of prevention initiatives in place and is restructuring its service to focus more on support and prevention. However, it has some weaknesses in its awareness of its prevention work. It has not analysed why homeless people are less likely than other tenants to sustain their tenancies; it does not always record advice referrals; and it does not have an agreed referral process for tenants of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) who are at risk of eviction.

#### Assessment of homeless people

6.22 The Council has a duty to make all necessary inquiries to satisfy itself whether homeless applicants are homeless or threatened with homelessness, have a priority need and became homeless or threatened with homelessness intentionally. The table below provides an overview of the Council's assessment decisions for people who apply to it for assistance.

	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08
	Council	Scotland	Council	Scotland	Council
All applications assessed in period	1,565	60,058	1,684	58,663	1,107
% priority unintentional	38%	52%	39%	52%	69%
% priority intentional	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%
% non-priority	6%	17%	7%	17%	8%
% not homeless	20%	9%	17%	8%	3%
% lost contact/withdrew before assessment	6%	13%	5%	13%	9%
% resolved prior to assessment	29%	7%	31%	7%	8%
Proportion of assessments completed within 28 days	71%	-	79%	-	96%

Source: Scottish Executive Housing Bulletins and the Council's inspection submission

- 6.23 The Council's pattern of assessment decisions changed significantly in 2007/08. It assessed significantly more applicants as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need and the proportion who had their situation resolved prior to assessment fell significantly. As we report above, the main reason for this is the Council's change to its practice in recording advice and assistance only applications. We found some inaccuracies in how the Council records its homeless decisions, although these did not affect the outcomes for the service users involved.
- 6.24 Scottish Ministers have set a target to reduce the number of applicants who receive non priority decisions by 50% by 2009, and to abolish the assessment of priority need by 2012. The Council told us that it had already met this target. However, we found a significant number of occasions where it advised people of likely non priority decisions, prior to initiating a homelessness assessment. The Council told us that it makes a reasonable and fair attempt to provide all relevant facts to allow clients to make an informed choice. However, this practice can deter people from making homeless applications and could mean that the Council is under-reporting the number of people who are homeless but not in priority need. It may also restrict access to services, such as temporary accommodation, support, and to the statutory review process. This is a significant weakness. The Council acted quickly to provide additional training for staff to ensure that it always maximises clients' access to homelessness services.
- 6.25 The Code of Guidance recommends that Councils should notify people of the outcome of their application as quickly as possible, and suggests a target of 28 days. The Council focuses on making decisions quickly, and its performance is good and improving. However, the Council records the date of an applicant's interview as the start of the assessment process, rather than when the applicant first approaches the service. The Council is aware of this weakness and has taken steps to address it. However, the Council's published performance information – 96% of decisions within 28 days in 2007/08 – is not accurate.

- 6.26 The Council's decision letters to applicants are clear and contain all relevant information. We saw an example of the Council having a decision letter translated very quickly.
- 6.27 The Code of Guidance recommends that Councils should keep applicants informed of progress with their application. We found that the Council did not routinely contact applicants during their application, but is good at keeping in touch with those applicants that it places in temporary accommodation.
- 6.28 We saw that the Council's officers are generally sensitive during assessment interviews to the needs of people who approach the Council for assistance. However, the Council does not always advise applicants of what to do if they became homeless out of hours and it is not always clear to applicants when or why their advice interview became a homeless assessment interview.
- 6.29 We found that once it has initiated a homeless assessment the Council makes good decisions and follows the correct sequence of inquiries. The Council's Advice and Assessment Manager approves all decisions to ensure consistency and quality. However, we found that the Council is not always clearly recording reasons for its decisions. We also saw some cases where the Council gave non priority decisions to vulnerable applicants with addictions, because they were not engaging with support services.
- 6.30 The Council has not been consistently or accurately recording applicants' ethnicity. As a result, the information that it has collected is not reliable and is of limited use to improve its service. When we raised this with the Council, it acted quickly to change its homeless assessment form to record ethnicity, as described by the applicant.
- 6.31 The Council has a duty to advise homeless applicants of their statutory right to request a review of its homelessness decisions. It notifies people of their right to request a review within 21 days in its decision letters. We looked at several recent appeals against decisions or offers of housing. We found that the Council dealt with these quickly and appropriately. At the time of our inspection, the

Council introduced improvements to the way it records and monitors information relating to appeals.

6.32 In summary, the Council is fair at assessing homeless applications. It makes decisions quickly and has a good approach to ensuring its decisions are correct. We saw some weaknesses in its recording of homeless information and decisions, and a significant weakness in how it handled applications from people who may have had no priority.

**Securing accommodation**

6.33 The Council uses a range of temporary accommodation for homeless people, including:

- emergency furnished standby flats;
- bed and breakfast (B&B) establishments, mostly located within Renfrewshire;
- supported accommodation, developed in partnership with a local RSL, including separate supported accommodation for young people; and
- furnished accommodation provided by the Council and its RSL partners.

6.34 The table below sets out key figures on the Council’s use of temporary accommodation.

	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>
	<b>Council</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>Council</b>
Number accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation	567	478	412
Percentage accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation	58.97%	55.58%	47.00%
Average length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation	24 days	33 days	34 days
No. of families with dependent children accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation	29	38	30
Number accommodated in Council furnished accommodation	314	364	259
Percentage accommodated in Council furnished accommodation	33.78%	38.52%	32.58%
Average length of stay in Council furnished accommodation (days)	92 days	101 days	100 days

6.35 The Council has successfully reduced the number and percentage of homeless households it accommodates in bed and breakfast (B&B) establishments since 2005/06. The Council's figures show a continuing reduction in its use of B&B, with 18 households placed in this type of accommodation in May 2008 compared

- to 43 households in May 2007. However, the average length of stay in B&B has increased since 2005/06. The average length of time households spend in all types of temporary accommodation has also increased over this period.
- 6.36 The Council has significantly reduced the numbers of homeless households it places in temporary accommodation outside the local authority area: down by 65% since 2004/05. Its figures show that it placed only one household in out of area accommodation in May 2008 compared to 31 in May 2007. The Council plans to eliminate its use of out of area placements by September 2008. This is positive. Since 2004/05, it has also reduced the number of families with dependent children it accommodates in B&B from 85 households in 2004/05 to 30 households in 2007/08. The Council's figures for the first two months of 2008/09 show this figure is continuing to decline.
- 6.37 The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004 prohibits councils from using unsuitable accommodation for households with children and pregnant women for longer than 14 days, unless exceptional circumstances apply. The Council has no reported breaches of the Order in the last three years.
- 6.38 The Council does not have a temporary accommodation strategy and has not conducted detailed analysis to determine how much it needs to increase the supply of temporary accommodation. It has increased the supply of alternative forms of accommodation to reduce its reliance on B&B accommodation. At the time of our inspection it had 150 furnished Council flats and 6 others it leases from RSL partners. It has recently agreed to increase the number of furnished Council flats to up to 200 and plans to increase the number of RSL leased properties to 10. The Council has also introduced a standby flat system, where it uses two dedicated furnished properties as an alternative to B&B accommodation for those who need accommodation outwith office hours. The Council is also developing two new supported accommodation projects, with a proposed total of 22 units. This may include direct access accommodation.

- 6.39 We found some weaknesses in the Council's approach to providing temporary accommodation:
- it does not always record that it has offered temporary accommodation or the reasons why it has been refused;
  - it is not always aware of, or took account of, an applicant's needs when offering temporary accommodation; and
  - it sometimes encourages applicants to stay in a "care of" address until a furnished flat is available, before it offered alternative temporary accommodation.
- 6.40 The Council is aware that it needs to address these weaknesses. It is restructuring its service to provide a more responsive approach through each caseworker having responsibility for an individual applicant's homelessness assessments and temporary accommodation. It has also reviewed its procedures and recording mechanisms to help address these weaknesses.
- 6.41 We visited the main bed and breakfast establishments used by the Council. Most of the accommodation was of a good standard, and the service-users we spoke with were satisfied with their accommodation. However, we found the quality of one establishment to be poor. Service users we spoke to in this establishment were dissatisfied with the quality of their accommodation and the facilities that were available for them.
- 6.42 We also visited some of the self-contained properties used by the Council with one of our tenant assessors. The Council has dispersed these properties across a wide range of areas, including higher demand areas. All of the properties we visited were of a high standard and service users we spoke to were pleased with the standard of the accommodation offered. The Council provides a good range of practical assistance and a good level of support for households placed in temporary accommodation.
- 6.43 In summary, the Council has made good progress in reducing its use of bed and breakfast accommodation, particularly those outwith its own area. It is continuing to expand its supply of temporary accommodation in order to meet its target of

- eliminating out of area placements by September 2008. However, there are a number of weaknesses in its management of temporary accommodation and one B&B used by the Council provides a poor standard of accommodation.
- 6.44 The Council is quick at offering permanent accommodation to homeless people. On average during 2007/08, it took 75 days to house homeless people from making a decision.
- 6.45 In response to an increasing backlog of homeless households waiting for permanent accommodation, the Council introduced an interim allocations initiative in early 2008. This led to the Council making over 50% of its lets to homeless people in the first two months of 2008/09. At the end of this initiative, the Council increased its ongoing target percentage of lets to homeless people from 25% to 40%. This should help it to prepare for the increased number of homeless people it will be required to house by 2012.
- 6.46 We found that the Council offers homeless people the same quality of permanent accommodation as it offers to other applicants. Whilst it has increased the number of offers it gives homeless people from one to two, this is still less than other applicants, who can receive up to four offers. We found, however, that the Council takes some account of an applicant's need to live in a particular area.
- 6.47 The Council works with RSLs in its area using section 5 referrals to access permanent accommodation for homeless people. The Council has a target that RSLs will make 25% of their relets in its area to homeless people through section 5 referrals. It intends to increase this target to 40%. The Council has not met its own targets for the number of homeless people it houses through RSL relets. This is largely due to the high proportion of unsuccessful referrals. In 2007/08, RSLs made only 18% of their relets to homeless people through section 5 referrals. The Council is working with RSLs to review its section 5 protocol to help it to increase the number of relets that RSLs make to homeless people through successful section 5 referrals. At the time of our inspection, the Council did not know what proportion of their lets RSLs have made to homeless people in 2008/09.

6.48 In summary, the Council is good at securing permanent accommodation for homeless people. It lets houses to homeless people relatively quickly and is increasing the overall percentage of its houses it aims to use to discharge its statutory duties to homeless people. It is not yet meeting its own targets for RSL lets to homeless people.

## 7. Is the housing service at Renfrewshire Council managed for improvement?

### Leadership and strategic planning

- 7.1 The Council has a clear strategic planning framework. It concluded a Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) with the Scottish Government in June 2008. The SOA is the Council's over-arching statement of its strategic focus. It specifies the 21 Outcomes that represent Renfrewshire Council's contribution to the national priorities set by the Scottish Government and the local priorities it identified through consultation with its strategic partners. The Council and its partners set out their agreed vision for Renfrewshire in its 2000-2010 Community Plan "a Pattern for Partnership". The Council sets out its values and its full range of corporate strategic objectives in its current Corporate Statement. These underpin the development and delivery of its services. The Council is presently developing the 2008-2017 Community Plan and has issued for consultation its Draft Vision Statement, detailing its vision, key aims and proposed actions. Most partner organisations we contacted were positive about working with the Council and about the strategic direction it has adopted. The Council makes all of its strategic plans available on its web site. The Council's Chief Executive meets quarterly with all departmental directors and heads of service to monitor and review progress with its corporate plans.
- 7.2 The Council operates a corporate framework of three year service improvement plans which elected members review and approve annually. In this way, the Council sets a clear direction for its housing and homelessness services. Its 2008/11 service improvement plan for Housing and Property Services demonstrates clear links to its corporate strategic objectives, LHS objectives and, where appropriate, its homelessness strategy. Housing and Property Services' improvement plan sets the strategic direction for the service and details its planned actions and outcomes expected to achieve identified priorities. The current plan sets out six key priorities for the next three years. However, the Council does not address in the service improvement plan a number of key strategic issues it faces, including:
- how it will create and maintain a sustainable Housing Revenue Account;

- how it will improve the efficiency of its housing repairs service; and
- how it will ensure value for money when procuring repairs and capital works to its houses.

The Council provides summary copies of the Housing and Property Services improvement plans to all staff and on posters displayed in its offices. The Director of Housing and Property Services meets periodically with all staff to brief them on key departmental developments and initiatives. We saw that staff have a good awareness of Housing and Property Services' main objectives.

7.3 The Council is funding a Leadership Development Programme for twenty senior managers in Housing and Property Services. It formally tested and assessed the managers involved and agreed Personal Development Plans. It is monitoring its managers' progress against these plans.

7.4 We saw effective leadership in the Council's Housing and Property Services and good support from elected members. This has enabled it to develop proposals for a comprehensive re-structuring of the service, introducing more efficient and cost effective methods of service delivery. The Council's partner organisations were generally positive about working with the Council.

### **Performance management, planning and reporting**

7.5 The Council has a good approach to corporate performance management. Housing and Property Services' improvement plans are supported by generally SMART action plans. The Housing and Property Services Best Value Directorate monitors progress against these action plans bi-monthly, but the Council reports progress to elected members on the Housing and Community Safety Policy Board only once during the course of each year. It gives the Council's Housing and Community Safety Policy Board the opportunity to assess and challenge performance outcomes in mid-year service performance monitoring reports. The Council makes these reports available to the public on its website. It also includes in these reports trend information, although it does not include comparisons with other councils' performance.

- 7.6 The Council has a good approach to performance management in its housing management services. We found a significant strength in its high level of self-awareness of its performance. We also found some examples of it using performance information to drive service improvements. The Council has established a robust Performance Management Framework (PMF). It has incorporated a range of key performance indicators (KPIs) in its current Housing and Property Services' improvement plan and has these approved annually by the Housing and Community Safety Policy Board. The Council's managers review its performance against these KPIs regularly and bi-monthly by the Housing and Property Services Best Value Directorate. It limits progress reports to elected members on the Housing and Community Safety Policy Board to one during the course of each year. The Council can regularly update elected members on matters which do not require formal decision through its ICT system, although Housing and Property Services has yet to use this facility. The Council acknowledged this weakness in its performance reporting and now proposes to report to members quarterly.
- 7.7 The Council has a clear commitment to continuous improvement in Housing Services, demonstrated by:
- its use of personal development plans for staff;
  - participation in a range of benchmarking networks and in peer reviews; and
  - collecting a range of information on the needs and aspirations of its customers.
- 7.8 While we found some evidence of staff having a clear appreciation of the Council's expectations of them, the Council does not consistently use formal written annual performance agreements and regular reviews with its staff.
- 7.9 The Council is working well to develop its PMF for its homelessness services in the context of significant changes to how the service is structured and delivered. The Council has a good awareness of its performance and where it needs to make improvements. It is still relatively early in this change process, but we saw that it is making good progress overall.

7.10 The Council has outlined a range of performance indicators for asset management and repairs services and does some benchmarking. However, we found that it had a limited awareness of weaker performance and areas for improvement, some of which are significant.

### Customer focus and influence

7.11 The Council has an extensive range of service standards covering all of its housing and homeless services. It has recently introduced an excellent booklet that provides customers with comprehensive information on the standard of service they can expect from the Council. It also makes these standards available on the Council's website.

7.12 The Council has excellent arrangements for recording and monitoring its performance in meeting its service standards targets. It regularly reports its performance against these to elected members but not routinely to tenants and service users. It has recognised that it needs to improve arrangements to publicise its performance on service standards.

7.13 The Council makes housing information easy to access for its customers. Its forms, leaflets and documents are in Plain English and it makes them available on request in a range of formats and community languages. However, we found that it does not always advertise the availability of its translation service on its publications.

7.14 The Council's approach to public reporting of housing performance is fair. It publicises various details of how well it is doing in a number of ways, including:

- on its website;
- in its now quarterly tenants' newsletter; Peoples' News
- in Renfrewshire Magazine, the Council's annual corporate newsletter
- its posters and its annual "How Are We Doing" publication, displayed in its public offices;
- its corporate Annual Report and Tenant Participation report; and
- its annual Antisocial Behaviour Strategy outcome report.

- However, the amount of information on the Council publishes on its website and in each of these publications is limited and it may not be easy for customers to find out how well the Council is performing in any particular service area.
- 7.15 The Council has carried out disability access audits on all its neighbourhood offices as well as Renfrewshire House. We found the physical accessibility of all its neighbourhood offices to be reasonable. Renfrewshire House has a ramped entrance to allow access for service users with mobility problems, although this ramp is potentially difficult for less able service users to negotiate. The Council does not have good external signage at all its neighbourhood offices. In addition, some reception desks were unsuitable for wheelchair users, although staff told us they would deal with this by using interview rooms. The Council has not reserved or identified car parking for disabled service users at two neighbourhood offices.
- 7.16 The Council provides portable hearing loops for service users with hearing difficulties and private interview facilities are available at each of the neighbourhood offices. The Council advises service users that facilities are available for those who do not have English as a first language through posters in community languages displayed at the reception areas of its offices.
- 7.17 The Council has good arrangements to meet applicants for housing or tenants in their own homes where necessary. It can produce its documents in alternative formats and can arrange signing and translating services. The Council has taken steps to ensure that reception staff have information on how to help customers with disabilities.
- 7.18 Renfrewshire Council carried out a major tenant satisfaction survey in 2004 and a second 10% sample survey of tenants in 2007. It used this information to compare some aspects of its performance against those of three other Scottish local authorities. The Council intends to use the 2007 survey results as the baseline for future annual surveys. The Council presented the survey findings to its Council Wide Forum of Tenant and Resident Associations. It also reported some of the survey findings to tenants in its newsletter Peoples' News. The

Council has analysed the survey findings, identified and introduced a range of improvement actions. However it did not involve service users in considering alternative proposals to deal with the issues highlighted in the survey.

7.19 The Council has excellent and developing arrangements to obtain the views of its tenants and service users. It uses a number of ways to do this in addition to its annual sample survey, including:

- discussions with its tenant organisations;
- neighbourhood office service exit questionnaires;
- new tenant questionnaires;
- until December 2007, its rent arrears advice survey;
- a recent mystery shopping exercise;
- its tenant participation survey;
- its repairs service satisfaction cards;
- Neighbourhood Forum participants' survey;
- kitchen renewal satisfaction survey ; and
- one off surveys on particular services, for example, communal laundries.

The Council also gathers homeless service user information through exit surveys. However, the Council has recognised that it needs to obtain service users views at key stages of its homelessness process rather than at its conclusion. The Council is good at collating feedback received through these arrangements and has used this to improve the way that it provides services.

7.20 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires the Council to publish a tenant participation strategy. The Act also requires landlords to inform and consult tenants about changes to its services and take tenants' views into account when making decisions that will affect them. The Council's approach to tenant participation is well established and it gives this a high level of commitment. It has 37 registered tenant organisations (RTOs) at the time of our inspection. It gives these organisations the opportunity to participate in Neighbourhood Forums that have the ability to allocate funds from area budgets to carry out works aimed at improving security, amenity or the appearance of a local area. The 2008/09 budget for this is in the region of £323,000 excluding professional

- fees. These are good arrangements and are highly valued by participants in the forums.
- 7.21 At the time of our inspection, the Council was revising its tenant participation structures to streamline its consultation and involvement framework. We saw that it had made a change to its proposals as a result of feedback received from the Council-wide Forum of tenants' and residents' groups.
- 7.22 The Council generally works well to engage RTOs in service and policy development and change. We found, however, examples of where it did not consult adequately on important issues, including changes to staffing cover at sheltered housing developments and the proposed closure of two of its local neighbourhood offices. We also found that it sometimes relied too heavily on consulting with its RTOs through its forum structure and did not attempt to consult more widely with its tenants. This is a weakness.
- 7.23 The Council makes it easy for customers to complain about its housing and homeless services. It has excellent procedures to deal with complaints, to monitor how well it is doing in responding to them and to use complaints positively to identify potential service improvements. Formal complaints are administered and answered by the Council's central support service, helping to ensure they are viewed objectively. Complainants receive a high quality, consistent standard of response. The Council routinely advises complainants how they can move to the next stage in the procedure if they are unhappy with the response they receive and how they may refer the matter to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. It asks each complainant to provide feedback on how well their complaint has been handled. It keeps information on the types of complaint, how it was received, the extent to which they are justified and on the Council's performance in dealing with it within target timescales. It reports this information monthly to the Council's senior management team. The Council was able to provide us with examples of where it had altered policies and procedures on the result of complaints it had received. None of the complaints received in the 12 months before our inspection had been referred to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. The Council also monitors at a service level it

performance in dealing with informal complaints and discusses these at team meetings

## Equalities and diversity

- 7.24 The Council's approach to equality and diversity has some strengths but also some weaknesses. The Council has set out its corporate commitment to equalities in its Equal Opportunities in Service Delivery policy, its Race Equality scheme and Race Equality policy. The Council is committed to improving its performance in this area and has a Customer Matters Strategy and Toolkit. The Council Housing and Property Services has set out its own approach in its draft Statement on Equal Opportunities for Service Provision and Equalities Action Plan.
- 7.25 Council staff that we spoke with confirmed that they have recently attended training on equalities issues and the Council has a range of materials to support them, such as a draft staff guide to equalities.
- 7.26 The Council currently does not have ethnic monitoring information for a significant number of housing applicants and new tenants. This has an impact on its ability to plan and improve future service delivery. The Council advised us during the inspection that it plans to address this weakness. The Council's monitoring of the ethnicity of people who approach its homelessness service also has weaknesses. The Council revised its homelessness application to help it better record information on ethnicity.
- 7.27 The Council is legally obliged to assess the potential impact of new policies and procedures on various equalities groups. We saw that the Council has only recently started to carry out impact assessments on key policies and procedures relating to housing and homelessness. The Council has advised us that it proposes to have these completed by the end of 2008/09. Later this year, the Council plans to consult on the needs of BME communities, as part of a joint research with local housing associations.

## Efficiency and value for money

- 7.28 The Council faces a number of significant challenges to managing its Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and so to securing the funding it needs to invest in its houses.
- 7.29 The Council's average rent of £55.53 per week is significantly higher than the average for Scottish councils and is the third highest in Scotland. This can be contrasted with its position 10 years ago when the Council's rents were in line with the Scottish figure. The significant rent increases over the last ten years have not reflected corresponding improvements in the condition of the Council's housing. In February 2008, the Council agreed to increase its rents by an average of 2.5%. The Council reported that this level of increase, along with £1.35 million of efficiency and other savings, was necessary in order to balance its Housing Revenue Account, which had been showing a £2 million deficit.
- 7.30 The Council's housing debt is amongst the highest in Scotland. The Council has reduced its 2008/09 budget for financing charges by about £2.2 million through capital receipts from land sales. The Council intends to apply anticipated receipts from land sales to reduce its debt burden further, although current market conditions present some risks to this strategy.
- 7.31 The Council's capacity to grow its housing income is significantly constrained going forward. Its rental income base is reducing each year through the impact of Right to Buy sales and its demolition programme of surplus housing stock: 1,449 homes, or 9.9% of its housing stock, have been lost between 2005/06 and 2007/08. Its ability to grow its income through rent increases is constrained by its already relatively high rent levels and the need to consider affordability for tenants.
- 7.32 The Council has agreed to transfer 50% of any surpluses generated by the trading activities of its Building Services to the HRA. This is a helpful contribution to housing income, although the level does not reflect that the HRA funds more than 75% of the value of the turnover of Building Services.

- 7.33 The Council's management and supervision expenditure generally compares favourably with other Scottish councils (see the table below), although it did increase to 2007/08 before it reduced to an estimated £595 for 2008/09.

	Renfrewshire Council		Scotland
	Total £m	£ per house	£ per house
<b>2005/06 Actual</b>	7.30m	501.00	548.00
<b>2006/07 Actual</b>	8.10m	568.00	606.00
<b>2007/08 Unaudited Accounts</b>	9.58m	724.00	630.00
<b>2008/09 Budget</b>	7.43m	595.00	660.00 (est)

- 7.34 The Council's expenditure has risen largely due to the reduction in the number of houses that it manages, meaning its costs for service delivery are spread over fewer houses. The Council has recognised that it needs to act to tackle this trend of increasing management costs. It is rationalising its framework of neighbourhood offices and is introducing a number of measures aimed at reducing its costs while moving towards a modernised model of service delivery. These initiatives are reflected in the service's 2008/09 budget and, with the Council's current service improvement plan, provide a good platform for potential service improvements and future efficiency savings. However, at the time of our inspection, it is too early to say what the scale of these may be in future years. The Council is also likely to face upward pressure on costs which are not unit specific or variable, particularly financing costs.

- 7.35 The Council's expenditure on repairs and maintenance in 2007/08 of £1,290 per house, and its estimated budget expenditure for 2008/09 of £1,312 per house, are about 25% higher than the average for Scottish council's. However, as we report above, the Council has weaknesses in demonstrating value for money in the procurement of works contracts for housing repairs and investment. Audit Scotland raised the demonstration of value for money in procurement as an issue for the Council in its 2005 Audit of Best Value and Community Planning.

- 7.36 The Council transferred £3 million from its reserves – or one third of its total reserves – in 2007/08 to finance its housing revenue expenditure. Its 2008/09 budget does not draw on its reserves, and its aims to make a small contribution to reserves. The Council has limited capacity to plan for use of its reserves at

- the 2007/08 level; its Auditor has highlighted that this would exhaust its reserves by 2009/10.
- 7.37 Taken together, these factors are a significant constraint on the Council's ability to afford additional borrowing or to generate sufficient surpluses on its HRA to fund investment in its houses. They demonstrate that the Council is operating in a very tight financial situation. The Council is likely to face increasingly difficult financial choices between balancing the annual HRA and meeting long term aims, such as achieving the SHQS.
- 7.38 The Council presented a business case to the Scottish Government in December 2007 in which it set out its proposals to achieve its assessed investment expenditure, including a request for financial support from the Scottish Government. It is continuing its discussions with the Scottish Government and is refining its business case. The Council undoubtedly faces challenges in securing the funding to invest in its houses, but it also has potential to deliver further efficiencies and, critically, to more accurately assess the level of investment its houses need.
- 7.39 Recently the Council has significantly lowered its expenditure on bed and breakfast accommodation and is planning for this cost to be eliminated in the coming year.

## 8. Next Steps

- 8.1 This report highlights our findings following this housing inspection. We expect all organisations to respond effectively to our recommendations using their own improvement planning processes. We ask organisations that receive fair or poor assessments overall in their housing management, asset management and repairs service or homelessness service to submit an improvement plan to us within eight weeks of the publication of this report.
- 8.2 Renfrewshire Council's improvement plan should show how it intends to respond to our findings in its asset management and repairs services and homelessness. The plan will be agreed with us. We follow up improvement plans at regular intervals.
- 8.3 If you would like to see Renfrewshire Council's improvement plan you should contact:
- Ms Jane Davis  
Housing Quality Officer  
Housing & Property Services  
Renfrewshire House  
Cotton Street  
Paisley PA1 1JD  
**Telephone:** 0141 840 3243  
**Email:** jane.davis@renfrewshire.gov.uk

## Sources of evidence

### Groups and third parties consulted

- Tenants' and Residents groups
- The Council's external auditor
- Scottish Government Tenant Rights and Participation Team
- Homepoint
- Scottish Government's Homelessness Team
- Scottish Government's Anti –Social Team
- Scottish Government's Social Housing Division
- Scottish Public Service Ombudsman
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Local Registered Social Landlords
- Neighbouring Local Authorities

### Interviews/Meetings

- Elected members
- Chief Executive
- Director of Housing and Property Services
- Internal Auditor
- Staff from Housing Services
- Staff from Building Services
- Staff from Homelessness Services
- Tenants and tenant representatives

### Reality checks

- Observation of information and advice to service users
- Observation of hostel and bed and breakfast accommodation
- Shadowing of allocations
- Shadowing of tenancy sign up interview
- Shadowing of an accompanied viewing
- Shadowing of assessment and follow-up interviews with homeless people
- Shadowing of temporary accommodation visits
- Shadowing of repairs call handling
- Shadowing of repair pre and post-inspections
- Shadowing of void repairs visits
- Review of short SST's
- Review of housing list applications and allocations
- Review of information for applicants and tenants
- Review of homelessness assessments and appeals
- Review of complaints
- Review of antisocial behaviour cases
- Review of arrears cases
- Review of legal actions against tenants
- Review of reported repairs
- Review of planned maintenance and improvement projects

- Review of stock information database
- Empty property visits
- Estate visits

### Key documents reviewed

- Renfrewshire Council's Inspection Submission
- Housing management performance reports
- Repairs and maintenance reports
- Relevant policy and procedures
- Minutes of meetings and associated reports
- Tenants' newsletters and other publicity material
- Council's website
- Outcome reports for housing management, property maintenance and homelessness
- Protocols with other agencies
- Local Housing Strategy
- Homelessness Strategy
- Strategic Housing Investment Plan
- Single Outcome Agreement
- Council Plan
- Community Plan
- Service Plans
- ASB Plan
- Tenant Participation Strategy
- Corporate Procurement Strategy

### Examples of Positive Practice

These are areas we would highlight as working particularly well, taking account of the organisation's operating context:

--

#### Occupational Therapist

Housing and Property Services has employed an occupational therapist. The therapist carries out medical assessments of housing applicants and has been able to improve its assessment and allocation process. The therapist works with housing staff to ensure a speedy assessment of tenants' applications for adaptations to their existing properties.

#### Antisocial Behaviour

The ASIST team agrees action plans with complainers and it makes effective use of the PEER (Prevention, Early intervention, Enforcement and Rehabilitation) approach to resolve incidents of ASB.

#### Asset Management System

The Council has invested in a management information system for asset management which holds the information of its stock on one database. The system is interfaced with its reactive repairs IT system and therefore there is the potential for the Council to access up to date information for each house.

## Glossary

<b>Anti Social Behaviour Order (ASBO)</b>	ASBOs are preventative orders designed to protect individuals from further antisocial behaviour that causes or is likely to cause alarm or distress. Breach of an order is a criminal offence, punishable by a fine or imprisonment.
<b>Asset management</b>	Ensuring that current and future assets (houses, land, etc) fully support the organisation's objectives – working towards having the right assets, of the right quality, in the right place at the right time.
<b>Benchmarking</b>	A process used by organisations to systematically compare service processes and performance to identify best practice.
<b>Capital Programme</b>	Programme of major repair works funded mostly from borrowing.
<b>CFCR</b>	Capital funded from current revenue
<b>Common housing register (CHR)</b>	A register of all applicants for social housing used by two or more landlords within an area.
<b>HomePoint</b>	<p>A team within the Scottish Government that supports providers of housing information and advice services.</p> <p>HomePoint has broken down advice activities into three types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Type I active information, sign-posting and explanation.</li><li>• Type II casework.</li><li>• Type III advocacy, representation and mediation.</li></ul>
<b>Housing list</b>	A list of applicants for housing that is used by the local authority to allocate its housing stock.
<b>Housing Revenue Account (HRA)</b>	The budget a local authority has from rental income for managing and maintaining its houses and Housing Services.
<b>ICT system</b>	Information and communication system.
<b>Notice of Proceedings (NOP)</b>	The formal notice provided to tenants informing them that their landlord is taking legal proceedings to seek a court order for recovery of possession of a property.
<b>Partnering</b>	In contract management, a structured approach to improving efficiency and quality of work. It aims to reduce confrontation between the Council and its consultants and contractors. Partnering requires formalised objectives, agreed problem solving methods and an active search for

	continued measurable improvements.
<b>Performance Standards</b>	Housing standards for all social landlords in Scotland, jointly agreed by the SFHA, COSLA and Communities Scotland.
<b>Planned maintenance</b>	The planned renewal or maintenance of key property components.
<b>Pre-inspections</b>	Inspections undertaken to ascertain the nature of the repair required.
<b>Post inspections</b>	Inspections undertaken following work to check the suitability and quality of repairs.
<b>Procurement</b>	The way an organisation obtains services or materials from other organisations or agents.
<b>Qualifying Repair</b>	Repairs that qualify for inclusion in the Right to Repair scheme.
<b>Registered social landlord (RSL)</b>	A landlord providing social rented housing that is registered and regulated by the Scottish Housing Regulator.
<b>Registered Tenant Organisation (RTO)</b>	A tenant-representative group meeting certain conditions set down in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and registered with a social landlord.
<b>Response repairs</b>	Day to day repairs carried out on a reactive basis, distinguishable from planned, capital or cyclical maintenance.
<b>Right to Buy</b>	The right of many Scottish tenants to buy their property at a discounted price, depending on length of tenancy.
<b>Right to Repair</b>	Statutory scheme which sets out timescales for some repairs, and what can be done by a tenant if a landlord does not do the repair within the timescales.
<b>Schedule of Rates (SOR)</b>	A costed list of all or most of the day-to-day repairs that a client is likely to instruct a contractor to do.
<b>Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)</b>	A minimum quality standard for all of Scotland's social homes. Landlords should achieve the standard by 2015.

<b>Scottish secure tenancy (SST)</b>	The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 establishes the Scottish Secure Tenancy as the tenancy for all tenants of social landlords in Scotland.
<b>Short Scottish secure tenancy (SSST)</b>	Section 34 and schedule 6 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 establish the basic conditions when a short Scottish secure tenancy can apply to some tenants of social landlords in Scotland in place of a full SST.
<b>Section 5 referral</b>	Where, under Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, a local authority can request a registered social landlord that has accommodation in its area to provide accommodation to homeless people.
<b>Shadowing</b>	An inspection technique that involves accompanying and observing staff while they carried out their day-to-day tasks.
<b>SMART criteria</b>	Performance management acronym for: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound.
<b>Statutory Performance Indicator (SPI)</b>	Indicators of local authorities' performance that are published by the Accounts Commission for Scotland.
<b>Stakeholder</b>	Any person or organisation using a landlord's service, affected by the landlord's actions or having an interest in the landlord's activities – an interested party.
<b>Tenancy agreement</b>	Legal document or contract between landlord and tenant setting out the rights and responsibilities of each.
<b>Tenant assessor</b>	Trained tenants (not of the landlord being inspected) who are part of the inspection team. They are involved in preparing for inspection, reading landlord materials and on-site visits as well as talking to tenants.
<b>Tenure</b>	The method by which a person occupies a property i.e. tenant, lodger, owner-occupier.
<b>Variations</b>	A term used to refer to the practice of changing a repair works order on site where the contractor feels additional or alternative work to that specified is required.
<b>Void</b>	A property without a tenant. Voids occur in the period between one tenant leaving and another taking over the tenancy.

## About the Scottish Housing Regulator

The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) is an executive agency of the Scottish Government. We exercise independently the regulatory powers of Scottish Ministers in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. We register and regulate independent social landlords. These are usually housing associations, but they can also be housing co-operatives or companies limited by guarantee. We also inspect the housing and homeless services provided by local authorities.

We operate independently and impartially, while remaining accountable to Scottish Ministers for the standard of our work and for inspecting and reporting within the overall context of Scottish Ministers' strategic objectives for the social housing sector and tackling homelessness. A code of practice sets out what Ministers expect from us in delegating their regulatory powers to us. Our independence is further safeguarded by a Regulation Board that supports the Chief Executive to manage and direct the organisation.

Our purpose is to:

- protect the interests of current and future tenants and other service users;
- ensure the continuing provision of good quality social housing in terms of decent homes, good services, value for money, and financial viability; and
- maintain the confidence of funders.

Our work supports the principles of public service reform by promoting good services that are organised around the needs of the people who use them. We encourage registered social landlords (RSLs) and local authorities to be open, accountable, efficient and well governed. And we expect them to provide equal opportunity and open access to their services.

[www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk](http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk)

The Scottish Housing Regulator  
Highlander House  
58 Waterloo Street  
Glasgow  
G2 7DA

Tel: 0141 271 3810

E: [shr@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:shr@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk)



## Availability in other formats

This document can be translated, on request, into your community language. Please phone 0141 271 3810 or email [shr@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:shr@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk).

يمكن ترجمة هذا المستند، لدى الطلب، إلى لغتك. يُرجى الاتصال بالهاتف على رقم 0141 271 3810 أو بالبريد الإلكتروني بالعنوان [shr@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:shr@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk)

এই দলিলটা আপনি চাইলে আপনার কমিউনিটির ভাষায় অনুবাদ করা যেতে পারে। দয়া করে এখানে ফোন করুনঃ 0141 271 3810 অথবা এই ঠিকানায় ই-মেইল করুনঃ [shr@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:shr@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk)

這份資料可以為你翻譯成中文。請致電 0141 271 3810 或發送電子郵件至：[shr@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:shr@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk)，要求獲得中文譯本。

گزارش پریدہ دستاویز کمیونٹی کی زبانوں میں ترجمہ کروائی جا سکتی ہے۔ براہ کرم مہربانی نمبر 0141 271 3810 پر فون کریں یا اس پتے پر ای میل بھیجیں : [shr@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:shr@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk)

Możemy zapewnić tłumaczenie niniejszego dokumentu na Państwa język ojczysty, proszę zadzwonić pod 0141 271 3810 lub wysłać e-mail do [shr@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:shr@scottishhousingregulator.gsi.gov.uk)